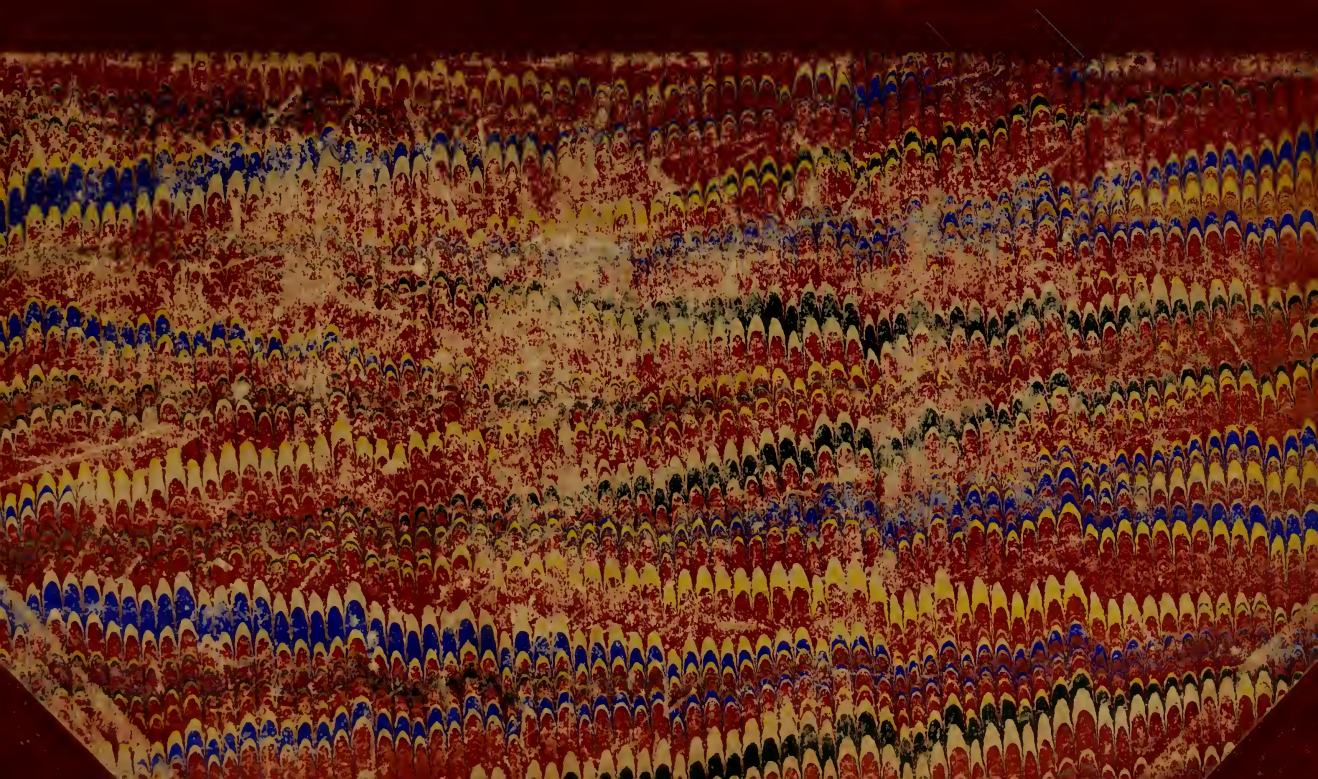
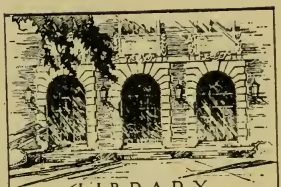


PE
3525 I6V



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
823
R562m
v.1

THE MAN SHE CARED FOR

BY

F. W. ROBINSON
AUTHOR OF
"GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY,"
"NO CHURCH,
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1884.

All rights reserved.

823
R562m
v. 1

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER PAGE

BOOK THE FIRST.

IN A DERBYSHIRE VILLAGE.

I. 'NAME UNKNOWN' 3
II. DANIEL OVERDOWN 14
III. A LATE ARRIVAL 30
IV. MR. OVERDOWN DOES NOT MAKE HIMSELF USEFUL 35
V. THE BETTER HALF 47
VI. SENT FOR 64
VII. INSTRUCTIONS 82
VIII. TWO CUTTINGS FROM THE NEWSPAPERS . . 87

BOOK THE SECOND.

GOOD SAMARITANS.

I. MRS. DANGERFIELD AT HOME . . . 91
II. A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD 100
III. FURTHER PARTICULARS 116

IV. The Result 123
V. In Search of Sam Challis 140
VI. At the 'Harp' 152
VII. Is it too Late? 159
VIII. The Good-looking Girl 171
IX. Aggie 180
X. 'Beware of the Girl' 188
XI. Both Grateful 196
XII. A Parting 205
XIII. Disappointment 217
XIV. 'No Sam' 232
XV. Cuppleditch's 241

BOOK THE THIRD.

THE MISTRESS OF ILVERCOMBE.

I. Coming Back to the World . . . 255
II. Still Curious 269
III. Following On 283
IV. An Early Visit 299

BOOK THE FIRST.

IN A DERBYSHIRE VILLAGE.

THE MAN SHE CARED FOR.

CHAPTER I.

'NAME UNKNOWN.'

THE accident had happened in an out-of-the-way part of the fair county of Derby, with no one to blame but a sleepy signalman. It had not been a 'great' accident, and a ten-line paragraph in the Birmingham and daily newspapers was considered sufficient for the general public. The London papers, for ever brimming over with accidents to life and limb, general property and man's fair fame, took no heed of a collision where there were only two passengers seriously injured, and fourteen but moderately contused, who were sent home, rather jolly than

otherwise, by the next up-train. Of the two seriously injured, the papers chronicled a third-class passenger, one Daniel Overdown, of Prosser Street, Birmingham, mechanic; and a first-class passenger, name unknown, and left, like a parcel to be called for, at the 'White Swan,' in the village, by anyone whom it might eventually concern.

Three days had passed since poor humanity had run into minerals and got the worst of it, and it seemed to concern nobody that a man sick, and shaken unto death, should be lying like a log at the 'White Swan.' The landlord was not nervous about him; there were a gold watch and chain worth fifty pounds, that would defray all expenses, funeral and otherwise; and heaven and the jewellers only knew the value of the diamond pin which, shimmering still in its black satin stock, rested in the left hand top drawer of the wainscot chest in the best bed-room. The landlord had turned the key upon it for precaution's sake, and everybody had forgotten it save that worthy gentleman.

The 'White Swan' was not a convenient hos-

telrie for a man to lie helpless in, but it had been Hobson's choice after the smash had occurred, and there were forty good miles across country between the village of Gravesly and the nearest hospital. The two men seriously hurt were carried down the valley by those lucky passengers who had escaped scot-free, Daniel Overdown being left at the first cottage, and the stranger, well-to-do, taken to the 'White Swan,' a rough little inn, planted in the heart of a quarryman's settlement, where tourists came not, and business was only brisk on Saturday evenings after pay-time. There had been a five-miles ride down the valley in search of a doctor, who arrived some minutes after a second medical man and his assistant had turned-up by special train along with two engineers and the break-down gang.

Whilst the line was being cleared and the passengers accommodated with fresh carriages, the doctor and his assistant, warned of pressing cases, had descended into the village, where a few scared women were talking of the accident, and of the poor fellows who had been brought for them to nurse. Here ensued the meeting

of the doctors, the inspection of the wounded, a hurried consultation, and the whipping-off of the right leg below the knee from the unlucky gentleman whom nobody knew. Here was life at stake, and minutes precious, and a serious responsibility hanging over the heads of a respectable railway company. The sufferer, when he was conscious—which was not often the case during the first four-and-twenty hours—had been asked who he was and where he lived, and had shaken his head energetically, as if he did not know, or did not care, and was altogether too excited to be harassed by constant questioning. As to Daniel Overdown, whose name and address had been found in full in his pocket-book, in his hat, on his collar, and on the left-hand tail of his shirt, he was past all excitement, and as still as a stone by this time; and there was much attention necessary to set *his* head right, and bring him back to the life which the collision had nearly crushed out of him.

Hence the two serious cases in the village of Gravesly, and three days' rest in Derbyshire, leaving the rich man and the poor one dependant on

strangers' assistance, and the railway company's supervision. 'Prostrate and helpless,' groaned forth the man at the 'Swan;' 'flat as a flounder,' said Daniel Overdown, whom a host of friends and acquaintances from Birmingham had already come to see, disregarding time and money in their interest for his safety.

It was a strange position—a vivid contrast that was subject-matter for much thought—this isolation of the rich man from all kith and kin, and the strong muster of friends round the bedside of the working man. Dives left to himself, without a soul to care apparently whether he lived or died; and Lazarus, a head-centre, who brought a small army of humble folk to inquire after his health, and to offer its assistance in any way that might chance to be of value. In their separate ways, both men were riddles to the outer world; the extra degree of interest and attention which a mechanic attracted to himself on one side, and the complete isolation on the other of one whose wealth might at least have purchased a semblance of respect for his grave affliction.

Still it was the unknown's obstinacy which probably kept friends away, rather than lack of sympathy from those who owed him fealty. That he had not communicated with his friends, and no one seemed to have missed him, might be explained by more reasons than that of general apathy, if the thin, gaunt man in the bed would only open his grey lips to solve the mystery he had created.

Three days after the accident he was conscious, terribly conscious that he was in a critical condition, that he had lost part of his right limb, that he might not get over the shock to his system, and that he was alone there, with a strange woman for nurse. He was very miserable, as well as obstinate; he had not taken his accident calmly, or the inevitable result with philosophy; it was his excitement, now demonstrative, and now suppressed, which kept him back, and from which he suffered. The mind fought against him as well as the body, and it was going hard with his struggle for life and strength—the odds against the silent man's salvation.

There were five sovereigns in his pockets, and

a card-case that contained only his railway ticket—first-class return from Birmingham to Culverley; and the only marks upon his fine linen were a D in German text. There was no clue to his identity, and he would not offer one himself, when the doctors became anxious, and a few outsiders, of whom more anon, grew curious.

'Don't worry me,' he murmured to the medical man whom the railway directors had sent, with their compliments, day after day; 'there is plenty of time.'

'Your friends?'

'They can wait. Everybody can wait,' he added, wearily.

'But it is my duty to warn you again that you are in a critical condition.'

'Do you mean I shall die?' asked the man, almost fiercely.

'No, I do not say that,' answered the doctor, cautiously.

He had not much hope of him, but he would not pledge his word, or wholly dishearten his patient.

'That I shall live?'

'With care, and ease to your mind, you may be spared—possibly.'

'The symptoms are not all against me?'

'Not all.'

'Thank God for it,' he cried, and then his lips quivered, and he tossed his arms strangely about his head, and beat the palms of his hands nervously upon the patchwork coverlet.

The doctor gave him drugs, and subdued him into temporary lethargy; and then the rector of a little village, five miles further inland, came to disturb him next day, having heard the news, and thinking, good, confident old man, that here was a case in which he might be of more service than the doctor.

The priest failed as well as the physician. The wounded man would have no father-confessor, or put his trust in anyone beyond himself. He was a trifle calmer that morning, and answered for a while evasively.

His friends were not anxious about him, he knew; they did not know where he was, and they believed in his safety. Where was the

necessity to alarm them—to distress them?

'But they have a right to know the truth.'

'The truth is better kept away from them,' said the patient, between his set teeth.

'How can you tell that?'

'I am sure of it.'

'But, sir, have you not a wife, or sons, or daughters, who are perplexed by your absence, distressed in mind concerning it, and to whom even such sad news as your accident would be a relief from suspense?'

'There is no one in suspense about me; I have told you so already,' he cried, querulously.

'It seems impossible that this should be so; and, if you will rely on me, I, a minister of the Gospel, will break the news carefully to those with whom you may wish me to communicate.'

The man closed his lips and shut his eyes, and would not reply by another word to his visitor.

There was no more for the minister to do, save to return home wondering at the motive for this rigid silence. Presently delirium set in again, and the sufferer raved of many things

and many people, but there was no clue to his identity throughout, and the doctors thought more of saving his life than of getting at his secret. Only once the man said, very clearly and distinctly, 'My poor Aggie;' and they who nursed him remembered it, and commented upon it later in the day.

Five or six days after the accident, an individual, sent by the railway directors, peered round the door whilst the patient lay sleeping, looked at him attentively, and went away again, after asking many questions of the host of the 'Swan,' and taking a cursory inspection of the watch and wardrobe of the unknown, the stock and diamond pin excepted, which the landlord forgot to show him.

'Don't know him; can't see anything in it,' said the detective, 'but will make inquiries.'

Which inquiries never came to anything, so far as the writer of this narrative is aware.

The man with the unknown name was of a strong constitution, and fought hard for life—fought his way through fever and madness to an intense prostration, where there appeared

to be, however, a little chance for his recovery. No one harassed him or questioned him now; his visitors were the doctors, his only companion a smart, middle-aged woman, more mechanical than inquisitive, and who was his nurse, duly certificated from London, and paid by the railway company for her services. When a fortnight had passed, the newspapers had forgotten the accident; there had been many glorious calamities in leader type since then, and one man sick at Gravesly was nothing to the public which paid its money for fresh news, and disliked vain repetitions. He was very ill, and quite forgotten. Even the quarrymen in the Derbyshire village had got used to his presence, and ceased to talk about him. They thought less of him than of Daniel Overdown, still suffering internally, and not able to be moved, but surfeited with friends and kind inquiries from the busy toy-shop of the world some few score miles away.

CHAPTER II.

DANIEL OVERDOWN.

THE man at the 'Swan' was well enough at last to allow of the bedstead being moved towards the window, to the frame of which he was able to cling, and thereby raise himself. There was nothing familiar in the landscape that met his gaze, nothing inspiriting or solacing to him in the green valley lying in the lap of the Derbyshire tors.

It was a prison-house, at which he groaned; the rugged, white stone walls shut him in along with the trees and cottages, and the brawling stream at their base, and there was no escape for him. All very picturesque, but very far from home and from those who might be won-

dering *now* where he was, and why he had not written. For time had gone on three weeks, and he had sent no news—and would send no news while he lay there.

He could not explain to anyone at home what mischance had led him in this direction—he could never explain it—it was beyond his courage as was the ascent to the hill-top by that thin line of rugged path, down which a shepherd's boy seemed eternally scrambling. Let them wonder for a short while longer till he returned, with a strange lie to account for his absence, and the grave accident which had made a cripple of him. There was that big fiction to study, and, as he looked up at the blue sky above the hills, it was perplexity rather than gratitude for his escape that gave an earnest expression to his pain-racked face. He was a man of some two-and-forty years of age, who had been handsome in his youth, and who retained some of his good looks till that day—a thin-faced man, with features sharp cut and clear, and stamped with a refinement born of high birth, or hard study, or both. He wore

neither beard, whiskers, nor moustache, and had it not been for his illness, which had aged and lined him, would have looked younger than his years. Even in his night-shirt, with his long neck craning over the window-sill, there was something of 'the swell' about him—a stand-offish kind of man, with whom one would not care to joke on an early acquaintance, or slap on the back and call 'old fellow,' or abbreviate his Christian name, or twist it into slang after the fashion of these free and easy times.

All the excitement that he had shown at an earlier period of his stay at the 'White Swan,' and which may have been part of his malady rather than of his character, had disappeared, and was replaced by a cool, if somewhat forced, imperturbability. He was grave and polite, and even grateful to his doctors, but there was no lowering of the veil before his life; on the contrary, the same studied intention of keeping himself and his antecedents in the shadow. He was anxious to read the newspapers, and still more anxious to know when he would be considered strong enough to leave; to be carried

on a litter down the valley even, and placed in a first-class carriage, if the company would stop the train for him *en route*—anything, so that he could be free of the position to which his accident had reduced him. By common consent, as it were, he had taken, and been called by, the name of Welby; but nobody believed in the name, and he did not assume the manner of one who believed in it himself.

He was not strong enough to quit his room when it was announced one early evening, by the landlord of the 'White Swan,' that a person below stairs was anxious to see him. Mr. Welby —we will call him by the name that he has adopted, for the nonce—elevated his eyebrows, and stared at his host.

'To see me?' said Mr. Welby, as if taking time to consider the position, whilst he repeated slowly the landlord's message.

'Yes, sir; for a few minutes.'

'Did he ask for me in particular?—did he mention my name?'

'He didn't mention any particular name, sir,' replied the landlord, with an objectionable grin

extending over his broad, red face; 'he said the gentleman upstairs who had met with the accident.'

'I decline to see him.'

'I thought you would.'

'Why?' was the quick inquiry.

'Well, sir, I thought it was a bit rude of the young fellow—forcing like—just because you wish to keep yourself to yourself.'

'Is this man very anxious to see me?' asked Mr. Welby, with more interest.

'I should say he was,' replied the landlord, deliberately.

'Does he pretend to know me? Where does he come from? What kind of man is he? What is his name?'

The host of the 'White Swan' answered the last question first.

'His name is Overdown, sir. He's the young man who was hurt at the same time as yourself, and was brought down the Grey Tor Vale to Skemmick's cottage.'

'Oh! that man,' said Mr. Welby, thoughtfully. 'He is well enough to get about then?'

'Yes.'

'To go away?'

'Yes, I believe so.'

'Lucky fellow!' added Mr. Welby, with a sigh.

He lay at the open window so still and silent after this, that the landlord took it as a hint the subject was dismissed, and that Mr. Overdown might be dismissed also; but, when he was opening the door to depart, Mr. Welby said, quickly and sharply,

'Stay!'

The 'White Swan' came to a full stop again.

'One moment, Mr. Giles.'

'All right, sir.'

'I have been thinking,' he said, slowly, 'that I will see this Mr.—Mr.—whatever his name may be. He is a fellow-sufferer, and we have both been martyrs to gross carelessness. He is the man whom I have seen drawn in a Bath-chair down the valley there?'

'That's *him*,' said the landlord, emphatically.

'Show him upstairs.'

'Yes, sir.'

Mr. Giles retired; and Mr. Welby drew the dressing-gown, which he had ordered to be purchased for him, more closely round his spare form, and put himself somewhat into attitude, more as if by habit than with any design to impress his coming visitor. One could almost imagine Mr. Welby had been in the habit of receiving deputations, and the first wave of his thin, white hand in the direction of a chair, as Mr. Daniel Overdown entered the room, would have added to the idea in the mind of an observant man.

Mr. Overdown was still looking white and ill, and the extreme blackness of his hair and eyes threw the pallor of his countenance into stronger relief than had he been a fairer man. He was a dapper little fellow of five feet five, and of three-and-twenty years of age, with a quick, brisk step of his own that his railway-shaking ought to have taken out of him. He came into the room like a man ready to receive an order, or measure something off-hand, and his sharp glance round the apartment and at the invalid told of a character which was hardly satisfied

with itself until it had grown familiar with 'surroundings.' There was an ease about Mr. Overdown's manner also that was striking in a man of his class, and dressed as he was, in a smeary suit of fustian, patent to factory life and labour. It was not the fussy obtrusiveness of a man ill-at-ease, and endeavouring to mask his nervousness by an air of self-assumption, but a demeanour that was natural, and which did not seem likely to be readily overawed or subdued. He was self-possessed, but not insolent, and he waited respectfully enough for Mr. Welby to open the conversation.

'You have expressed a wish to see me,' said Mr. Welby at last.

'Well, for the matter of that, sir, I have seen you already,' was the brisk answer.

'Indeed! Where?'

'Looking from that window down the valley, when my mates came to take a turn with the Bath-chair last Saturday and Sunday; looking as miserable, too, I was inclined to fancy, as if you were sorry I had got the start of you.'

He laughed pleasantly at this, but Mr. Welby

only regarded him gravely in return. He was not well enough just then to appreciate a joke.

'I *was* miserable,' he said, however; 'it is hard I am the last to recover.'

'Somebody must be the last,' returned Overdown. 'I don't think that that idea would have entered my head, had I been in your place. But there's no telling human nature, that's my theory, sir; there's no making any man or woman out completely—no making one's self out. There's a cobweb always in some dark corner or other, bustle about as we may.'

Mr. Welby stared at this remark, launched at him, as it were, and his face must have shown that he disliked it, for Mr. Overdown said, quickly,

'You will excuse that little bit of the shop, sir; but I am a man with a habit of going it generally for the improvement of my species, after my worthy stepfather's pattern, though I don't agree with *him*, mind you. You know my stepfather, I daresay?'

'It is not likely.'

'Not Dobson the delegate? Why, he's been locked up half-a-dozen times, and proud he is of it, too. He has done a mighty deal of good in his day—and a mighty deal of harm,' he added, drily.

'The name is familiar to me—from the newspapers, I suppose.'

'Most likely—when he's not in prison you'll find him in the papers. He's getting queer now, and isn't half so bright as he used to be, poor old boy. But I have not come to bother you about family matters,' he added, as Mr. Welby put one hand to his forehead, as though his head ached.

'You talk very rapidly,' said Mr. Welby, half apologetically, 'and I have not been used to conversation lately.'

'I am sorry,' said the other. 'I ought to have been more careful, considering my friends came down in droves to see me, and talked me clean off my head in twenty-four hours, after our spill. But healthy people have no consideration for sick ones. That's another of my theories, that in ninety-nine men out of a hundred there isn't

—but you don't care whether there isn't or is just now, do you?'

'I can't say I follow you,' said Mr. Welby, wearily. 'Will you excuse my lying down? I am not as strong as I thought I was.'

'I am talking you silly; that's like me,' the man muttered, in self-disparagement. 'Let me help you?'

With a care that reminded Mr. Welby of his certificated nurse downstairs, the young man shifted the pillows of the sufferer, moved him with gentle, but strong arms, rendered him altogether more comfortable.

'The fact is, I am so glad to get back to Birmingham, to work, and to Daddy Dobson, who's down with the gout—and a devil to manage when he is gouty—and to my Saturday discussions, and all that kind of thing, that I am as talkative as an old woman, and have as little thought for others as that lump of spar has upon the mantel-piece. Excuse me—I think I mean well, but am plaguey rough at times. Want of cultivation, this,' he added, by way of explanation.

'May I ask if you have any motive in calling upon me, Mr. Overdown?' inquired Mr. Welby, politely.

'It has not appeared yet, has it?' was the sly rejoinder.

'No.'

'I have a heap of reasons, but I must begin again at full length, if you wish to know them all.'

'I don't think I can bear much more,' said Mr. Welby, feebly.

The young man overpowered him by his superior health, and beat down all desire to snub him, or quell his insufferable loquacity. Mr. Welby realised how weak he was now, for he was a man grim and deterrent, when his ill moods were uppermost, and people who bored him came in his way. Not that he disliked this young man, take him altogether, although his recovery from the accident annoyed him and was an indirect affront to him. God knows how much longer he was to be tied to that wretched room, and that outlook at the valley and the great grey hills, and the

eternal isolation which accompanied them. He should never see an English hillside or one of its fair valleys again without realising the bitterness of his terrible incapacity.

'I called to say good-bye to a man who was smashed up with me,' said Mr. Overdown; 'and to ask you if I can be of any service in Birmingham.'

'I do not live in Birmingham.'

'You come to Birmingham now and then, though?'

'How do you know?'

'I have seen you in the streets. Once you called at my governor's factory—Edgewick's Small Arms. I remember your face perfectly.'

Mr. Welby winced. What an objectionable memory this man had; what evil genius had led him to ask him into his room?

'It must have been years ago,' he muttered.

'Yes; five or six years, perhaps. There was a lady with you—very tall, and dark, and handsome; and Mr. Edgewick went round the factory with you both. Old Edgewick, not the young one.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Welby, in reply to his visitor's past offer of assistance. 'I am obliged by your consideration for me, but the greatest kindness is to allow me to get well by myself.'

'Yes; that's the strange part of it,' remarked Mr. Overdown, 'and that is why I take the liberty of saying you can't get well after any such fashion.'

'Can't get well! Great heaven, man,' he exclaimed, testily, 'I am getting well rapidly.'

'You want friends here. A man in distress can't get on without friends.'

'I haven't any,' was the bitter answer.

'Oh, I don't believe that.'

'I haven't a friend I wish to see. Good evening, Mr.—Mr. Overdown. I thank you for calling.'

'Don't mention it. Good evening. I wish you better, sir.'

He went with his brisk step to the door and paused again.

'Of course, I don't care about your reasons for hiding——' he began.

'Hiding!' was the indignant ejaculation of the invalid.

'I am not very curious in that way, and other folk's secrets don't trouble me much,' he continued; 'but still I can't help feeling I might be of use here, and I should like to be of use. Surely there is somebody to whom you would be glad to send a word.'

Mr. Welby compressed his lips. This was the old torturing business over again, by stupid people who meant well, but could never fathom to the depth of a secret with which he had been determined to die—with which he had thought it best to die, being an inflexible being in his way.

'Thank you, no,' said Mr. Welby. 'Good evening.'

'I leave some time to-morrow for the Culverley station, in Skemmick's pig-cart, and shall take the first train to Birmingham, passing by this valley without another upset, I hope, ugly as the curve is round the base of that confounded quarry. You were going to Culverley when the accident happened; but is there no one worth sending a word to now?'

'No one,' said Mr. Welby, in a deep voice.

'If there had been, I——'

'For God's sake don't kill me with your pertinacity,' raved forth the man at last; 'you see I do not require your assistance. I know I am ungrateful,' he added, in a weaker voice, and with the instinctive feeling of a gentleman that he had given unnecessary offence in return for a proffered kindness; 'but I shall be well enough soon to manage my own affairs.'

'I hope so, sir, with all my heart.'

'I'm sure of it—almost.'

'And if not quite as sure to-morrow—and before I go—why, you have only to send down a word to me at Skemmick's. And I'll come on, sir, sharp.'

'Thank you—very much.'

'And so good-night to you.'

'Good-night.'

CHAPTER III.

A LATE ARRIVAL.

THUS the two men parted, and Daniel Overdown went slowly out of the inn, pondering over the mystery of Mr. Welby's life. He smoked a pipe over the problem as he walked along the valley, where the shadows of night were gathering together and stealing up the sides of the giant tors, whose overlapping brows of granite stood out, clear and sharp, against the deep blue of the sky above them.

'I suppose there's a woman at the bottom of it,' Daniel Overdown said, as he turned back towards Mr. Skemmick's cottage, 'and that's his look out, not mine. Always a woman at the bottom of every trouble under the sun, some people say.'

He was not so strong as he had bargained for —for he found that he had ventured too far along the valley, and was unable to get back without a rest. He sat down on the bank with his legs dangling over the stream, which swift, noisy, and turgid rushed past him in endless wrath with the obstacles in its way—a river discontented for ever. He refilled, lighted, and smoked another pipe, and thought of his own affairs now in lieu of those of the gentleman at the 'White Swan'—of his little house in one of the grimiest streets of Birmingham, of his work next week, of his busy daily life, of his life apart from labour, the leisure hours which he devoted, as he thought, to the improvement of men less clever than himself, of his whole career which, clear as the day, most people knew, of his ambitions which, dark as the on-coming night, no one dreamed save himself, and which were only dreams. He thought away every scrap of daylight, and, when he rose to proceed the rest of his journey to Skemmick's, it was under a sky blazing with a host of stars.

When he was in the shadowy village where

the lights were, the sign of the 'White Swan' reminded him of his old fellow-passenger, and, with his gaze directed to the window, closed and curtained for the night, he muttered again,

'Yes; I should say there's a woman at the bottom of it, if we could only find out, or cared to take the trouble to find out.'

He had not been a nervous man before the accident—on the contrary, very self-possessed and cool, and a trifle opinionated—but he gave a sideway jump as he became aware of a two-horse equipage standing before the door of the 'White Swan.' There was so little light in the village, which boasted not of gas in so rural a district, that at first sight he fancied it was a hearse and two black horses, and that Mr. Welby had died suddenly, and been as suddenly fetched by an undertaker of remarkable promptitude. When he had recovered himself, he became aware that it was simply a post-chaise which had scared him, with a postilion standing at the horses' heads, and the landlord standing by the side of the postilion.

'Here—hi! Mr. Overdown,' called forth the

landlord, 'you are wanted down at Skemmick's.'

'Who wants me?'

'The lady who came in this.'

'To see *him?*' inquired Mr. Overdown, with a gesture of his hand in the direction of the up-stairs window.

'Yes, that's it. When she heard he was asleep, and that you had been with him half an hour ago, she said she would see you first, and went off in a hurry to Skemmick's.'

'Oh! indeed.'

Mr. Overdown proceeded on his journey. At the end of the village, or the beginning of it, according to which way one looked at this small settlement, was the one-storied stone house of Mr. Skemmick, quarryman; and hither the man from Birmingham proceeded, opening the door by means of a primitive latch from the outside, and stepping at once, without any ceremony of a passage, into a red-tiled front parlour.

Mr. and Mrs. Skemmick, a rosy-faced young couple, were there as usual, and two little Skemmicks, twin boys, who were only awed by

a stranger's presence from making a dash at Mr. Overdown's legs at the first moment of his arrival, and a tall and stately lady, very white and wan, whose heavy, black-silk dress was for ever afterwards to Mrs. Skemmick a thing of wonder and beauty and cost. Stiff as a turnpike post, it was.

'Here's Mr. Overdown, mum, as I was a-speaking to you about,' said Mrs. Skemmick, by way of introduction.

'This is the woman *he* didn't want to see,' muttered Mr. Overdown, to himself, as he took off his cap, and made his best bow to the lady.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. OVERDOWN DOES NOT MAKE HIMSELF USEFUL.

A CAPITAL memory for faces had Daniel Overdown. Some men are blessed, or afflicted, by this gift to a remarkable extent, and Mr. Overdown was one of them. He remembered the lady at once; she it was who had accompanied 'Mr. Welby' over Edgewick's Small Arms Factory some five or six years since, the tall, dark lady, of whom he had spoken to the invalid at the 'White Swan.' He should have known her anywhere; first, by her height, which was five feet eight, at least; secondly, by her pale, handsome, fretful-looking face, upon which more than one quiet comment had been made on the day of the visitors' inspection of the works.

Probably it had been a weary expression then—the look of a woman whose health was indifferent, or whose interest had not been awakened, or who was very quickly bored by small arms in all stages of manufacture, and by the legion of workmen employed upon their construction. Certainly on that day her indifference had been generally marked; and Mr. Overdown still remembered how she had walked with grave demeanour from room to room, glancing at very little, and leaving all the questioning to her husband.

It was the same face—scarcely changed in any degree—a trifle whiter, perhaps, as if anxiety, or, the fatigue of travelling, had left its mark there. She was sitting with one arm resting on the table, and her gloved hand supporting her chin; and she did not change her attitude as Mr. Overdown advanced. She looked at him from two clear, brown eyes, as if she doubted him, or was on her guard against any statement he might make.

'Good evening, ma'am,' he said, in his usual brisk way, and the lady faintly inclined her

head to his salutation, keeping her steady eyes fixed on him.

'Your name is Overdown, this good woman tells me?' the lady said, slowly and deliberately.

'At your service, madam,' he replied.

'Those in my service are invariably well paid,' she said, meaningly, but in the same slow tones; 'and you will be no exception to the rule, if you are able to assist me.'

'I am afraid there is no chance of remuneration, then,' he added, lightly.

'Why, no chance?'

'Because I don't see my way to be of assistance to you.'

'Ah! you are in my husband's confidence,' she added, with a faint ring of scorn in her reply.

'I think not,' answered Mr. Overdown; 'that is, if your husband is the sick gentleman at the "White Swan?"'

'I have reason to believe he is. I have not seen him yet,' she replied; and the gloved hand left her chin and clasped the other in her

lap tightly and quickly. It was the first evidence of emotion that she had shown.

'Mr. Welby?'

'That is the name he goes by in this place?' she inquired.

'That is the name,' was the reply.

'There was a railway accident some weeks since near the Grey Tor Vale, and you and Mr. Welby were the two passengers whom it was found expedient to bring here?'

'Yes, madam.'

'You and this gentleman were going on to Culverley—a small town, ten miles away, I think?'

'About ten miles,' answered Mr. Overdown.

He did not reply to the first portion of the inquiry, he hardly knew why. It was no business of his; he had not been enjoined to secresy but there was a secret, good or bad, connected with Mr. Welby's mission, and he did not feel disposed to help to betray it. It could bring no happiness to the tall woman, who had travelled post-haste to solve the mystery for herself; he was assured of that already. It might even

mar some chance of happiness, of future confidence, for what he knew of the matter, and he would give every man his fair chance.

The lady was quick enough to detect his hesitation.

'I asked if you and Mr. Welby were travelling to Culverley,' she said.

'I was going several miles past Culverley on business; where Mr. Welby was going, I cannot say.'

'You had not seen him before the accident?'

'Once before—years ago—at Edgewick's factory in Birmingham.'

'Only once before?'

'Only once.'

'May I ask how many times you and Mr. Welby have met since?'

'I have seen him looking out of the window of his room more than once, watching me down the valley so wistfully that my heart has ached for him.'

'You went to see him this evening—you were anxious to see him, the landlord of the inn informs me.'

'I wished to see a fellow-sufferer before I went away to-morrow; he seemed to be very much alone, and very unhappy, and I thought I might be of some service.'

'Well?'

'Well,' said Daniel Overdown; 'that's all.'

'Did he not trust you?'

'No.'

'Not with a message to his wife?—or to any other lady, or gentleman?' she added, after a pause.

'Not a word. He said he was getting well, and should soon be able to act for himself.'

'No wish expressed of any kind, then?' she added, doubtingly.

'No,' replied Mr. Overdown, for the third time.

'You are telling me the truth, I hope,' said the lady; and the face lost suddenly its weariness or fretfulness of expression, and was full of eagerness for a few fleeting minutes, whilst she spoke. 'You do not know what a life-long misery a few deceitful words of yours may cause now. If you are a good man, you will tell me all you know.'

'Madam, unfortunately I know nothing,' answered Overdown. 'I am not in your husband's confidence. He will probably tell you all when you meet. You will excuse me, but I hardly understand why you expect information from me.'

'Because——' she began; then she came to a full stop, and the old weary look returned with her enforced silence. Because she distrusted Mr. Welby, thought Daniel Overdown, and considered the truth more easily got at in the quarryman's cottage than from the lips of the sufferer at the 'Swan;' because, had he, the mechanic, known the truth, money might have bribed it out of him in the estimation of this fine lady, who was evidently as perplexed as everybody else as to Mr. Welby's motives for coming down to Derbyshire.

Mr. Overdown did not press for a reply; he leaned against the wainscot table by the latticed window, and twisted his cap round in his hands. There was no more to say on either side, he imagined; he knew nothing of Mr. Welby's second life—that life in the shade, and for ever

apart from life with this lady—and hence there was no need for further conversation. Still Mrs. Welby seemed reluctant to depart, although Mr. and Mrs. Skemmick and their awe-struck children were dying to get rid of her.

'It is strange,' Mrs. Welby murmured at last, as she rose. 'I have no alternative save to believe you.'

'I am sorry you doubt my word, but,' shaking his head lightly, and laughing lightly too, 'I shall get over it.'

'I doubt everything and everybody just now,' she muttered, more to herself than to her listeners. 'If I have hurt your feelings, you must forgive me, but I am a woman naturally perplexed. I am not myself.'

It was a graceful apology, if made with the same air of weariness which had marked her general demeanour, and Mr. Overdown bowed again, and said, 'Don't mention it,' and then followed her out of the house, and slowly along the dark and dusty roadway, in the direction of the inn. The lady glanced at him with a faint surprise after a while.

'I hardly require an escort—I am taking you out of your way,' she said.

'I will see you as far as the "Swan," with your permission.'

The lady inclined her head, and walked on somewhat slowly. The suspicion had come to her again—was she a suspicious woman?—that the man had something to tell her after all, and had postponed the revelation till they were alone together. She might have seen that before. It was natural that he should be discreet before the people at the cottage. She slackened her pace still more, and once glanced askance at her companion, but he was pursuing his way moodily, with his hands clasped behind his back, and his eyes directed to the ground. She gave him time, but he would not avail himself of it, and she remarked, at last,

'You have nothing further to say, Mr. Overdown?'

'Nothing, except this. That if I can be of any use in this muddle to you, or your husband, I am willing. I do not know,' he added, 'why I should push myself forward, but I

have still the notion I might be of service.'

'I do not see how you can help me,' she replied, more coldly.

'If I were to break the news to the gentleman that you have arrived, for instance,' he suggested.

'Do you think my presence will frighten him so much?' she asked, with slow severity.

'He does not expect you,' was the reply.

'I shall not scare him a great deal.'

'He is very weak.'

'I will be careful of him.'

'Why, that's your duty,' said Mr. Overdown, bluntly; 'though,' he added, 'it's not every woman who knows her duty, or where forgiveness might step in even before it, and make things straight again.'

Daniel Overdown addressed this aphorism to the dusty road, but the lady at his side glanced quickly at him.

'Are you a religious man?' she asked, with greater interest.

'Can't say I am, exactly; though I have been to chapel once or twice. Odd, isn't it?'

'For a man of your class, I admit it is,' she answered.

'Oh, you don't know what my class is, or how it behaves itself after work,' he replied; 'you think we are all at the public-houses guzzling down our grievances and our wages. We're—but here's the "Swan," and that ugly black coach of yours, and I will wish you a good evening.'

'Good evening.'

'I'm still at Edgewick's Small Arm Factory, Birmingham, if wanted,' he said, with emphasis; 'if not, why, all the better for us all. Good-night, again, and good luck to you and *him*.'

He jerked his thumb towards the window where the light was burning, and she might have read a warning in his gesture, if she had cared to take it from one so immeasurably below her own position in the world. But she was a woman who had faith in herself, as well as in God—the greater faith in her own poor estimate of what was right and just than in His, although she would not have dared to confess it, or believed even that she had it.

And it was with this immense measure of self-

confidence that the tall lady went back to the 'Swan,' and to the husband whom she had tracked there.

CHAPTER V.

THE BETTER HALF.

THE landlord of the 'Swan' was standing under the ivy-clad porch of his picturesque inn, waiting for the lady's return. He wore a dubious and perplexed air on his broad, pasty face, and was smoking a long clay pipe—his 'church-warden'—with solemnity.

During the lady's absence, down at Skemmick's, he had had time to think the matter over, to take his own good lady into his confidence, to examine and cross-examine the postilion, and ascertain how the mysterious visitor had turned up by the express from London, driven to the hotel in a fly, ordered a post-chaise, at any cost, so that time should not be wasted, 'harassed

and fidgeted and worried everybody all round,' until the post-chaise was ready, upbraided the postilion *en route*, and reflected on his lazy driving, and the bad condition of his horseflesh, and wore him 'to skin and bone' by continually letting down the window and asking him how many miles it was now.

There was evidently a storm brewing, and mine host did not look forward with pleasure to a tempest in his establishment. He could not see the end of it, and of what might follow the end of it, he had hinted to his wife. To aggravate matters, Mr. Welby would *not* wake up to be informed of the fresh arrival, and Miss Eyles, 'the certificated,' who had been conferred with, was as perplexed as he was.

'It's a great bother,' she said.

'I wish she hadn't found him,' confessed the host.

'She will never want to see him,' remarked the nurse, dubiously; 'she will be content, I daresay, with hearing how he is getting on.'

'Ye-es,' said the landlord, 'but she's his wife, mind you.'

'So much the worse,' was the sharp answer.

'Under the circumstances, so much the worse, as you say, ma'am.'

'I think I will see Mrs. Welby, when she comes,' said the nurse.

'Yes, that's right, do,' the landlord responded, with alacrity.

'It will be better.'

'Very much better,' was the positive assent.

But, when the lady had arrived, the nurse was not at hand, as the landlord had hoped and prayed she might be, and there was he left to receive the first brunt of it after all.

'Good evening again to you, ma'am,' said the landlord.

'Good evening.'

'He's still asleep, lady,' he explained, in a low, deep bass, 'and I can't help fancying it's a pity to wake him now it's so late. Don't you think the morning would——'

'I am not able to stay till the morning; I return to-night,' she said, almost snappishly.

'Ye-es, exactly, ma'am; so the postilion has been saying, but still——'

'Tell the nurse I want to see her, please,' said the lady, interrupting him; 'she will understand me better than you.'

'I don't see that exactly.'

'You seem dull and confused.'

'Oh, indeed. Well,' he said, 'I'll send for her directly.'

Presently the nurse appeared. She came downstairs in her list slippers as noiseless as a cat, and bowed with great gravity, keeping a keen watch on the traveller, as if endeavouring to read what were the thoughts, doubts, and hopes behind that quiet, pale, aristocratic face.

She bowed low to the lady, who made the slightest movement of her head in return, and by way of acknowledgment of the nurse's salutation.

'He is asleep, madam,' she said, 'and it will be very unwise to disturb him at this time of night.'

'Why?'

'He is very weak still,' she added.

'And you think I shall disturb him?' asked the lady,

The nurse hardly knew how to reply. She thought she read something of dissatisfaction and suspicion, as well as anxiety in the face; the shadow of a scene to come—the characters, a woman deceived and a man found out—was surely cast upon the screen, and yet she was not sure.

'The least thing disturbs him, madam,' she went on to remark.

'I am not the least thing,' was the cold answer.

'And in his critical position I will not answer for the consequences.'

'I will.'

'I am responsible to the doctor for my patient,' said the nurse, with spirit. Nurses, like lionesses, are easily roused: they will reign supreme in the sick-room, or know the reason why their dominion is interfered with—even a 'monthly' of the real old Gamp class cuts up roughly at a trifle.

'I have the doctor's permission to see the patient.'

'At this hour?' said the nurse, wonderingly.

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

'Yes,' answered the lady, producing the letter from the pocket of her dress; 'are you Miss Eyles?'

The nurse nodded an assent, took the letter from the lady's hand, and read the few lines which it contained.

It ran as follows :

'Allow this lady to see Mr. Welby immediately upon her arrival.'

'Very well,' she said, 'but the gentleman is asleep. You will not attempt to wake him?'

'I will not attempt to wake him,' she echoed back.

'It is as much as his life is worth to do so—he is feverish to-night; rest is everything to him,' said the nurse, once more, and by way of extra warning.

'I will not disturb his rest, if it can possibly be avoided.'

'He is in your hands now, madam,'

Mrs. Welby did not reply, and Miss Eyles led the way upstairs reluctantly.

She was a shrewd woman, who knew better what was safe at this juncture than a doctor

miles away from the patient, and, as we have hinted, she did not admire the manner of the patient's wife. It was haughty towards herself, but that she could have put up with, and it was not natural to the lady. Hence there was self-repression, and what the result of seeing the sick man might be, or of the sick man seeing his wife, was difficult to guess at, if the self-repression gave way or burst up. She washed her hands of the responsibility, and put the doctor's letter in her pocket. She had warned the lady, and the lady had snubbed her for her pains—a wife had every right to visit her husband certainly, but she somehow wished that it had not been a wife of this pattern.

Into the sick-room glided the nurse; into the sick-room rustled the woman who had tracked her runaway lord to his lair. A lamp was burning on the table, its light shaded from the invalid by the curtain of the bed being drawn between it and him; a book that the nurse had been reading, and the nurse's watch—a large, silver, turnipy article—were on the table by the side of the lamp. The wife went across the room to

the table without glancing towards the bed—she was nervous now, perhaps, and needed time to compose herself. She took up the watch and set it down again, as if anxious about the time—it was close upon ten o'clock—and then a second watch, of chased and massive gold, upon the mantelpiece attracted her attention. Mr. Welby had worn it that day for the first time since his accident, and Mrs. Welby recognised it, and the big foreign coin appended to the chain, which shook and jingled with her own shaking hand.

Miss Eyles wished Mrs. Welby a hundred miles off—further off than the fate which had brought her there.

'Yes, it is his,' the lady whispered to herself; then she put the watch down, and faced the sleeping man at last. He was lying very calm and still just then—a grim-faced rigidity that one might have taken for a corpse without much stretch of the imagination. She looked eagerly towards him, and then went step-by-step nearer to the bed until she was close against the chintz curtain, which she drew back so

that the light for a moment fell upon his face.

'Paul, poor Paul!' she murmured.

'Don't touch the curtain, please,' whispered the nurse, jealous of all interference with her arrangements for the sick man's comfort; 'you must not do that.'

'He sleeps very peacefully.'

'It is his one chance,' warned Miss Eyles again.

The visitor did not reply—did not hear her. She sank into a chair by the bedside, clasped her gloved hands together, and, after watching her husband for a few more minutes, spread them suddenly before her face. Miss Eyles could hear many whispered words; long, hurried sentences of extempore prayer, which sounded strangely and impressively at that hour, although they jarred upon the nurse's sensitive ears. Presently the sleeping man moved restlessly in his bed, as though prayers troubled him, and the nurse was on her feet again, and gesticulating to the lady, now leaning across the coverlet, with her hands dropped from her face. The lady saw the nurse's warning gestures, but took no heed of

them; she kept her place there, grave and anxious, and he whom she watched opened his eyes and glanced at her as at a vision which had come to him in the night—an awful vision, which he had prayed to God might never afflict him in an hour like this.

'Frances,' he whispered, hoarsely, 'it is *you*, then?'

'Yes, it is I,' she answered, very calmly.

'At last.'

'You never sent for me.'

'No, I never sent.'

'Are you afraid of me now that I am here, Paul?'

'No, no,' he answered, hurriedly, 'but you should not have come to this place—I am getting better.'

'Without me—yes,' she added, with a sigh.

'I thought it would be best,' he continued, with difficulty, 'that you should be ignorant—of this. I was afraid of alarming you—there was no necessity to—to distress you—and the child—and all our friends. I thought I should get

well more quickly than I have done, and come back sooner—don't you see?'

'I see, Paul, that you have been very considerate towards me,' she said, still quietly, 'but this was a difficult thing to conceal, and a long absence hard to explain—even to me, always taking your word for truth, and never doubting your honour and good faith.'

There was a moment's pause, and the pallid features of the man were for an instant changed to a dusky red, as the wife added, very slowly,

'Never till this day.'

He did not answer her, he might have even turned an appealing glance towards his nurse for an interference at this crisis, for Miss Eyles' voice once more broke in upon the marital dialogue.

'If you would postpone further questions till the morning, madam, it would be for the benefit of my patient. You are depriving him of his chance of a night's rest, and I must really beg you to be silent,' said the nurse.

'I shall be many miles away before the

morning,' the wife replied. 'I have no time to spare.'

'You are going away at once?' asked the husband, curiously.

'Yes, unless you wish me to stay—unless you think I can be of any use to you,' she answered, with an anxious look towards him, as if she hoped she might be.

'No—no, I think not.'

'Very well.'

He lay silent for awhile; then he murmured,

'I have everything I wish. She'—indicating Miss Eyles by a slight movement—'is very attentive, and clever, and cool. I had better keep as quiet as I can.'

'I think so, too,' said the wife, more coldly, 'I have made no arrangement to stay, and our Estelle is far from well again.'

'Poor girl, I am sorry for that.'

'She has been fretting for you lately.'

The man's lips began to quiver, and the eyelids to blink tremulously. He was terribly weak still.

'Give my love to her,' he added, in a broken voice.

'When you return home—when you have related everything to me that you think I have a right to know—it will be time enough to give a father's love to her,' said the wife. 'At present she believes you are in Italy. I have tried—to my shame, perhaps!—to deceive her all I can, for she is very young, and very weak, and thinks a great deal of her father, and, perhaps, I could not explain to her how I found you here, or under what circumstances. The mystery of this must for ever remain apart from her innocent young life.'

'It will be best,' he muttered.

'God knows what is best—I don't think you ever did, Paul,' she said, regretfully; 'and this is the end of a great deception that has lasted many years between us. I see it now,' she added, with a half groan. 'I should have seen it long ago if I had had less trust in you.'

'What have you seen?' he asked, timidly.

'*That woman!*' she cried, indignantly and passionately, at last; 'her whom you were going to Culverley to see, when God Almighty struck you down in your wickedness. It was His judgment.'

It was the jealous woman now, no longer the saint who prayed, or the stoic who kept cool, but an impassioned, inconsiderate female, with her heart stabbed too deeply to play propriety before a hired nurse and a sick husband. He would deceive her on his death-bed for his paltry name's sake, and she would have none of his deception. Let him know, at least, that she had found him out, and would never in all her after life forgive him, come what would—never, never, never!

'You are mistaken—you are in the wrong,' he shouted back at her, with great excitement, in his turn; 'I was going to Culverley for——'

He came to a full stop, and turned of a greyish hue. Once more, and for the third time with some effect, the vigilant Miss Eyles interposed.

'Mrs. Welby,' she said, with extraordinary severity of tone, 'I warn you that you will be your husband's death, if you remain any longer. I must insist,' she added, with a little stamp of her foot, 'on your immediate departure.'

The tall lady drew herself up to every inch of her height, and looked down proudly at the

woman who hissed at her this warning; then her colour changed, and her manner altered considerably.

'I have no more to say,' she said, almost meekly; 'I forgot myself, and your charge. I hope,' with a timid glance towards her husband, 'that I have done no harm by speaking to you.'

'I hope not.'

'I pray not.'

She leaned over the bed again, regarding him who lay there very anxiously.

'I am going,' she said; 'have you anything to say before I go?'

'Not now.'

'Not a word of explanation, Paul?'

'I can't say anything more to-night,' he answered, huskily and wearily; 'let me be, please.'

'What there is to forgive, I may forgive, Paul, in good time,' she added, gently now. 'Will that set your mind at rest, if—if we shall not meet again?'

'Yes,' he answered, softly, 'I think it will.'

'But there is—oh! my poor husband—there is One to ask forgiveness of, before myself. Pray,

think of Him; ask Him to spare you years of life and of repentance. Will you?'

'Presently.'

'You are getting better every day, the doctor says,' she added, assuringly; 'and, when you are home again, we will try to think the best of everything, and lead a different life, with Heaven's help, and for our dear child's sake. Why not? I will not be unmerciful; you have not been a bad husband to me, although I did not know—did not dream that—Good-bye, Paul; I will send to-morrow to inquire after you,' she added, as she hastily broke away from one last reproach hovering on her lips.

'Good-bye, Frances,' he murmured.

She hurried from the room, first dropping money into the nurse's hand, which closed upon two sovereigns by the purest instinct, though the rules of the Institute were against the gift, and went downstairs in her blind swiftness, and through a whirling mist of tears. She had betrayed something of the agony of her heart, but not much. If the invalid, or the nurse Eyles, had only known of the struggle it had been to

keep back all that was festering in her mind and memory, all that was driving her mad with jealousy and wounded pride, and the misery of a dull, dead future, where consolation could come never again, and where happiness lay dead, and religion, in that hour, only seemed to mock her, they would have pitied her more, and wondered at her struggle with herself ending so well. If they could have heard her sobs and wild wailings, in the darkness of the coach as it was whirled away, along the country road, from the husband who was afraid of her, they might have understood more clearly the nature of the trial she had experienced, and the bitter awakening to the truth it had been.

CHAPTER VI.

SENT FOR.

THE next day was all bright sunshine in the valley, a hot day of its kind, with no breeze to shake the leaves of the great trees, and the busy brook, a torrent of molten silver in the sun.

It was a fair picture of peace and rest in the green bosom of picturesque old Derbyshire. Tragedy, or the shadow of tragedy, can surely not belong to this spot, lying far away from the great cities, where the throbbing, feverish hearts are always beating madly. Who could dream of great trouble a hundred yards or so distant from this quiet landscape, or of grim forebodings, terrible reproaches, and vain regrets—of the fearful despair which comes ever to the

sinner from whom the world is slipping away, and to whom the world has been everything, and its Maker but a name, perhaps a terror? The scene around seemed to breathe only of content; even the birds had ceased their bickerings and were full of music, or else silent in their nests; the sky was of a deep blue, flecked here and there by dazzling white clouds which sailed on grandly through the azure; and the country lad in the distance, fishing from the red brick arch across the stream, was part of the scene's harmony, for all his sorrow that the fish would not nibble at his bait that day.

'Now it's actually come to going home, it's almost a pity,' said Mr. Overdown, standing with his hands in his pockets, and his legs very wide apart, at the door of Mr. Skemmick's cottage; 'it's like the end of a holiday, almost.'

'Dontee go then,' suggested Mr. Skemmick, home for his twelve o'clock meal, and very busy at it within doors, and speaking with his mouth full, 'we're in no hoory to get rid o' ye, mate; and,' he added, with a chuckle, 'the railway pays all expenses.'

'Yes, but I don't want to embarrass it with a big bill for board and lodging, as well as for wear and tear of constitution,' Dan said, laughing; 'and the doctor reports that I am fit for work. I was anxious about work yesterday, but dashed if I am to-day, somehow. I know why, though.'

'Why, how's that, Mr. Overdown?' asked Mr. Skemmick.

'It's that big swell at the "Swan,"' replied Daniel; 'I don't like leaving him somehow—all by himself like. We have been together here; we came down together, got damaged together, and we ought to have gone home together. That would have been a fair and square arrangement, mind you, Mr. Skemmick; that would have been winding up the history neat and tidy.'

Mr. Skemmick gave a loud laugh, and a 'Get out with you for that,' as though he imagined Daniel Overdown to be perpetrating a joke; but Mrs. Skemmick said, with great solemnity,

'It's my belief he's nearer home than you, Mr Overdown, by a big, long way.'

'Eh—what?' he said, sharply; 'do you mean going to die?'

'That I do mean.'

'Good lor'.'

'There was a great winding-sheet in the candle last night, when Skemmick and I went up to bed,' she explained, still further. 'Don't you remember, Skemmick?'

'Ay, I do,' replied Skemmick, becoming solemn himself at the reminiscence; 'o' course there was.'

'Ah, we don't believe in any of that rubbish, Birmingham way,' said Mr. Overdown, bluntly, 'though I believe it's the odds against the gentleman all the same. I didn't like the look of him last time; I didn't like the glare in his eyes,' he added, very thoughtfully.

'It's a bad sign when they glares,' said Skemmick.

'I wonder what he said to the lady, or the lady to him,' observed Mrs. Skemmick.

'Yes, so do I,' replied Mr. Overdown. 'I hope it was all right; I hope they kissed and made it up, if there was anything to make up,

which there might have been, you know. Which there was, I suppose, or he would have sent for her ever so long ago.'

'To be sure,' said Skemmick; 'he's fro' London—bean't he?'

'Yes.'

'Mayhap, then, he's stolen something, and was trying to get away,' said Skemmick, seized with a new and bright idea; 'there's a rare heap of thieves in London, I've heard tell. Oceans of 'em.'

Mr. Overdown did not reply to this. He had a better opinion of London folk than the quarryman, or else he was not disposed to contradict the assertion, or else he had not been listening to him. Presently he said,

'I had the idea he might not be long for this world when I called upon him yesterday, and that is why I did call. I thought he might have trusted me for the want of a better man. Skemmick!'

'Holloo!' answered Skemmick.

'I shall walk down to the "Swan" again, and ask how he is this morning,' said Dan. 'I've got him on my mind, old man.'

'You'll tire yourself out.'

'Pooh! not I.'

'Ye're not yourself yet, by a long chalk.'

'I'm a lion, Skem,' was the reply.

Mr. Dan Overdown set off down the valley; and the twin Skemmicks, with nothing to do that day but fret surreptitiously at the prospect of Mr. Overdown's departure, scrambled to their feet and insisted upon accompanying him.

'Ye maun come back,' screamed the mother, after them.

'Let them be,' answered Overdown, 'we shan't see much more of each other; poor little kids,' he added, as though he thought the loss of his society to them was a blow from which they might not speedily recover.

He walked down the valley, holding a twin by each hand, and, brightening up with the bright sunshine without, he launched into small talk and odd remarks, and even grotesque steps, to amuse the children until the Skemmick juniors were shrieking with laughter, and he fancied he should leave them 'pretty jolly, after all.'

Half-way down the road he met the stable-boy from the 'Swan' inn, slouching along at a fair pace—a boy who was three-fourths an idiot, it was thought in Gravesly, and who was trudging towards him with his mouth open and his tongue out. He, like all the rest of the village, knew Dan Overdown very well by sight now. Dan Overdown had made a point of knowing everybody long ago.

The stable-boy, being very much of a dolt, would have passed him with a nod and a vacant grin, had not Dan said,

'Where are you going, Jem?'

'Oo—ay—I be going for you, to be sure,' he said, with another grin, of most extraordinary dimensions this time.

'Why, you addlepate, why didn't you say so,' exclaimed Dan. 'Who wants me?'

'I doant know.'

'Who sent for me?'

'Oo—measter told me to coom and find you.'

'Oh, did he? And how's the gentleman upstairs?'

'Mortal bad.'

'I'm wanted,' muttered Dan, '*he* wants me, after all.'

He sent the young Skemmicks back to their home, weeping and wailing at their summary dismissal, and, with the stable-boy keeping as much step with him as a pair of clumsy feet, describing segments of circles, would allow, the gunsmith stepped out briskly for the 'Swan.'

The landlord and landlady were waiting for him in the broad passage, both looking grave enough now, as though the probable misfortune of losing Mr. Welby severely affected them; which it did, as a customer of some standing, who might have been good for half-a-dozen more weeks, 'if it had not pleased the Lord to hurry him bang off,' said the landlord to Mr. Overdown.

'He's been asking for you every half minute,' added the landlady, 'so you'd better go up at once.'

'Is the doctor there?'

'He has been here, but Mr. Welby wouldn't let him stop. He's coming again presently,'

was the landlord's reply; 'don't see the good of it myself, except to add to his bill. But he's coming.'

'What does the doctor say?'

'That he's worse—much worse.'

'That's bad; I'm sorry.'

'It's all that woman's bothering last night,' said the landlord.

'Very likely. Women will bother.'

Daniel Overdown went softly upstairs and tapped at the door of the room wherein he had been introduced some eighteen hours since. The nurse opened the door, and put her fingers to her lips, enjoining caution to the new-comer, and then made way for him to enter.

'He has arrived, sir,' she said, in a low voice.

'That's well,' murmured the invalid, in a voice much lower still—a far-away voice that was a little startling, 'that's well. He will wait, and give me time.'

There was no more said for a while, not even when Daniel Overdown was looking upon the white, pinched face of the sufferer, whose eyes

were fixed upon the visitor with a strange, yearning gaze, and yet with a strange doubt of him, as if, even at the last, he feared to trust the man.

Miss Eyles placed a chair at the side of the bed for the gunsmith, who sat down, cap in hand, and waited for any commands with which Mr. Welby might think to favour him. There had come a great change to the sick man since he, Dan Overdown, had seen him last—a change for the worse; and yet, only the change which comes, sooner or later, to all of us, poor mortals, in turn. To this man lying here, a change much sooner than he had bargained for, or prepared for. That was the crying shame of it; in that hour of his discontent, a grief and a surprise as well, but none the less a shame, he was convinced in his own mind. If he had been only allowed to live a little longer, if he had been mercifully spared to make things right, how much better it would have been for everybody!

Presently the thin, white lips parted, and he said,

'It is very good of you to come, Mr. Overdown.'

'Not at all,' was the reply.

'Yes, it *is;* very good of you.'

'I only hope I can be of service in some way, and that you haven't had the trouble of seeing me again for nothing,' said Dan; 'for if, in any fashion——'

He stopped, as the man raised his hand from the coverlet in a deprecating manner, as though Mr. Overdown's explanation was of no concern to him, or took up too much time at a critical period of his own career.

'Thank you. Yes,' he said; 'now, let me think a moment, please.'

There was another long pause; and the ticking of Mr. Welby's watch upon the mantelpiece was very loud and noisy in the silence of the room.

The sick man said, at last,

'I have changed for the worse. They say I may not live the day out.'

'I'm sorry to hear it, sir, very sorry.'

'Do you see—any great alteration in me—yourself?'

'Well, sir—I must say—you've altered, somehow,' answered Daniel Overdown, hesitatingly, 'but——'

'Don't keep interrupting me,' said the invalid, querulously again; 'I can't get on if you talk as well as I.'

'All right, sir.'

Mr. Welby considered the position again; Miss Eyles, the nurse, slipped back, and sat down in the shadow of the curtain, in the secret hope that her patient would forget her presence; for she was not above her sex's little weaknesses, of which we have heard curiosity is one that dates from very early times indeed, and Daniel Overdown twisted his cap in his hands, and did not speak again.

'When you came here yesterday evening,' recommenced the gentleman whom we at present know only as Mr. Welby, 'you implied—that you would be glad—to be of help to me.'

Daniel nodded.

'That's quite correct, sir.'

'That was kind of you. And this morning I have been thinking you might be of service. Of

very great service,' he repeated, thoughtfully.

'Well, sir, I'll try to be.'

'There's a something in your face which says, "Trust me"; and,' he concluded, with a strange, pathetic grimace, 'I haven't anybody else to trust. Not one.'

'I'm sure, sir——' began the nurse, taken off her guard by this assertion.

He stared at the nurse's face peering round the curtain at him.

'You have been very kind to me, Miss Eyles, but'—closing his lips very firmly—'one never trusts a woman.'

'Ah, I don't agree with you there,' cried Dan Overdown.

'Or trusts a woman too much, and is deceived by her,' continued Mr. Welby; 'as would be very natural. Will you be good enough to leave us, Miss Eyles? I should be much obliged to you.'

'But——'

'Mr. Overdown can call you at any moment. I—I have private business with—the gentleman,' he said, very precisely, if very feebly.

'As you please, Mr. Welby; and if you insist,' said Miss Eyles, rising, and going reluctantly from the room.

'Lock the door,' said Mr. Welby, hastily and eagerly, 'then she can't come back.'

Daniel Overdown looked surprised, but he crossed the room and turned the key in the lock as the sick man had requested.

'Are you sure it is fastened?' asked Mr. Welby.

'Quite sure.'

'Come and sit down here, then, close to me, so that I need not raise my voice too loudly. Can you hear every word I say?'

'Every word.'

'I don't know what made you think that I had anything preying on my mind,' whispered the sick man. 'I have kept myself very quiet and free from excitement, whilst I have been in this place. There was nothing to warrant your suspicions.'

'Excepting your objection to let anyone know where you were,' added Mr. Overdown.

'Oh, yes, there was *that*, certainly. I had forgotten for a moment. What should you think was my reason, now?' he added, very curiously; 'in your humble way, you seem a shrewd man. What should you think?'

'Well—you were hiding from the wife who was moving heaven and earth to find *you*,' said Mr. Overdown; 'you were coming this way secretly and sneakingly—if you'll excuse my saying so—and the whole thing is very easily guessed.'

'Easily guessed!'

'To be sure.'

'Go on,' said the invalid.

'If there had been a fair and honest reason, you would not have objected to the wife's knowing where you were. If——'

'If,' repeated Mr. Welby, watching him very closely, as he paused.

'If there had not been another woman somewhere,' was the blunt reply, at last.

Mr. Welby's eyes quivered very much like a man's with the sun very strong upon them, but he shook his head to and fro in protest

against the insinuations of his companion.

'You are wrong in your suspicions—completely worng.'

'That's good hearing, sir.'

'You'll think that. *She*, and you, and everybody else. That's how the world judges—always! As if there could be no other reason, save a low, despicable intrigue. As if I were—not above it—as if——'

'Well, there was *not* a woman in the case,' cried Overdown; 'and, by Jove! I am glad of that, though I don't know what it is to do with me.'

'You are too quick, sir; there may be a woman in the case, without her being a guilty woman. I may have been compelled to come this way secretly, at the risk of the little happiness left to me and my home, but none the less compelled to come. God knows this is my trial more than anyone else's,' he cried, with great excitement now; 'and that in striving to do good, not harm, to save and not to sin, I have been misjudged by man, and struck down by God.'

'I wouldn't go on like that,' said Dan Overdown, quietly, and touching his restless hand. 'Not at the last, sir—with you so close to the end. That's not as a man should leave this world or pass into the next.'

Mr, Welby was soothed by the other's earnestness—even impressed by it.

'You are—a good fellow—I think,' he murmured. 'I stand corrected, sir.'

'I'm not a good fellow,' was the reply, 'but I don't like to hear you rave about your wrongs too much.'

'Ah! and I have brought my wrongs—my punishment—upon myself, Overdown,' he said, sadly; 'as people will, very often. Are you sure you locked that door?'

'Yes.'

'Are you sure you are prepared to do me one honest service, that—that I cannot do myself?'

'Yes,' said Daniel Overdown, again.

'Keeping my secret?'

'Keeping your secret.'

'Or divulging it, if so it should be necessary, presently?'

'Yes.'

'Trusting me blindly, as it were—as I trust you?'

'Well—yes.'

'For there *are* things which pass out of the world with me also—which belong to my life, and must not disturb the lives of other men. So much the better this.'

'Perhaps so. I cannot tell,' said Overdown.

Daniel Overdown waited very patiently; but, strange to say, with time so precious to the dying man, there was still the reluctance to proceed, which was part and parcel of a naturally secretive nature. Mr. Welby had all his life been difficult to understand, and his end was like unto the rest of it.

There was a few moments more of hesitation, then he gave a deep sigh, and said,

'Listen to me, please. This is what I want you to do.'

CHAPTER VII.

INSTRUCTIONS.

To avoid vain repetitions we will not detail to the reader in the present chapter all the instructions which the gentleman. under the false name of Welby gave to Daniel Overdown, of Birmingham. They form part of the mystery enwrapping the life of an eccentric man, of not too good a man, of a man beset by many weaknesses and vanities, and yet striving hard to do his best—an impossible best as it was, and likely to turn out the worst at any moment, as it had done. A chapter or two hence, this Daniel Overdown will fulfil Mr. Welby's mission, and draw the veil aside with his own hands, and, so far as he was able, from

that story in which he had become interested, and which was to affect the whole tenor of his life.

Suffice it to say now, that the interview was a long one, and that the instructions took a considerable time to make clear to the gunsmith. There were interruptions also, and outbursts of passion and remorse, strangely commingled with the old weak protestations of injustice to himself in the shape of the cruel doubts and the ungenerous verdicts on his conduct, that had been made by those who should have trusted him implicitly, and taken his word for everything.

When he had finished, Daniel Overdown was perhaps less surprised at the family doubts and suspicions than he had been before; but then, the sufferer had told him he should keep part of the story to himself, which he did religiously, and presently went out of the world with after his own peculiar fashion, and with never an one the wiser. It was all for the best, he was sure.

He had always been so sure of everything!

Daniel Overdown touched his hand again when he had told him the story, or that part of the story which seemed necessary, and said,

'You may trust me, Mr.——'

'Dangerfield,' was the reply.

'And it is Mrs. Dangerfield who was here last night, who——'

'Yes, yes; that is it.'

'Ah, poor woman. I think I understand now.'

He rose, and the man in bed said, with a sigh,

'I wish I could reward you in some way; but I am quite helpless here. There is a diamond pin of mine somewhere about, or my gold watch which might——'

'No, no; they'd think I had stolen it. I don't want any reward for what I am going to do. I am interested,' he said, 'and shall do it very willingly. Perhaps the reward will come in that, who knows, sir?'

'Ah, who knows,' was the dying man's reply; 'but still I wish I could help you. You see how impossible it is?'

'Yes, I see.'

Mr. Dangerfield, *alias* Welby, made a great effort to reach his hand towards the gunsmith, and Mr. Overdown, seeing this, put his own brown hand upon the sick man's.

'God bless you,' murmured Mr. Welby, 'and good-bye.'

'Good-bye, and God bless *you*,' was the slow answer back.

Thus Daniel Overdown and Mr. Dangerfield parted with each other for good.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO CUTTINGS FROM THE NEWSPAPERS.

'1. On the sixteenth inst., at Gravesly, Derbyshire, Paul Erasmus Wilberforce Dangerfield, Secretary to Her Majesty's Blank Carriage Department, Whitehall, in the forty-second year of his age. Friends will please accept this intimation.

'2. We regret to observe that our obituary of this morning records the name of Mr. Paul Erasmus Wilberforce Dangerfield, the able Secretary to Her Majesty's Blank Cartridge Department, Whitehall, who was an unfortunate sufferer in the railway collision at Grey Tor Vale, Derbyshire, in the beginning of last month, and who, after giving to his

numerous friends and relatives great hope of his ultimate recovery, finally succumbed to the injuries he had received. The deceased was an able and earnest servant of the Crown, indefatigable in his public duties, and probably marked out for the highest official distinction, had not this unfortunate accident terminated his career. He was well known as an Oriental scholar of no mean attainments, and was closely related to the Dangerfields of Warwickshire. He married in 18— Frances, youngest daughter of Lord Redclove, who, with her only daughter, is left to mourn his premature decease.'

BOOK THE SECOND.

GOOD SAMARITANS.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. DANGERFIELD AT HOME.

It is close upon two years since the untimely death of Mr. Dangerfield, whom, under the name of Welby, we attended at the 'White Swan,' Gravesly. The memory of a government secretary lasts not two years in the outer world, where secretaries are plentiful and business is brisk; all the 'little talk' about that gentleman —the little mystery that a few busybodies made out of him, and an eccentric expedition to Derbyshire—had been set aside for newer, fresher scandals, and there were only one or two intimately concerned, intimately related, who remembered what a charming man Mr. Dangerfield had been, what a loss to society he

was, and perhaps wondered a little what would have happened had he lived.

There were many thoughts of the dead man at a house in Regent's Park still; the wife had not forgotten him in twenty-four months, and still wore—somewhat unwisely for a widow who had 'chances'—the deepest mourning for her lord. The crape skirt was pretentious, invidious folk asserted, at this remote stage of widowhood; it was as deep as on the day of Mr. Dangerfield's funeral, which she had personally attended, and the widow's face was almost as long. That is to say, in kinder words, that the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield's countenance was very grave and sorrowful; full of a thought which the satire of the few who decried her could not drive away; full of the doubt even, born of past experience, that there was not much good in the world when one came to sift it thoroughly. The Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield believed in her own goodness, however, and had turned more serious of late days. She had given up society after her husband's decease, and had become extremely reserved in mundane

affairs, and extremely 'high' in matters of religious observance. She had been left very well off, and could indulge in her sorrows luxuriously. Mr. Dangerfield had had a large fortune with her, and had dropped, after his marriage and his father's death, into a neat fortune of his own; and neither had been spent, but had been put out to good interest, and embarked in safe companies, and all that he had touched had turned to gold. Happy fellow, this Dangerfield, everybody had said; one of those lucky dogs on the right side of politics, with plenty of money, and heaps of aristocratic friends; a man who had done well, risen in the world well, married well, and would have been positively a great man had he lived a little longer, and not booked from London to Culverley one unlucky day, and been smashed up *en route*.

Mrs. Dangerfield still wore deep mourning, then, for her husband. It could scarcely be said that she fretted for him; no one remembered the shedding of the widow's tears, even at his funeral; her own daughter, Estelle, had not seen mamma cry. The widow was always very

grave, almost stern, of aspect; a tall, stately, youngish woman for four and thirty, who looked steadily at the dead level of things she called the world, and did not flinch from it, and the duties which she had set herself in it. She was not enjoying life—it was more than possible that she never would again; she had lost faith in her fellow-creatures, though she subscribed to all the charities, and went to church every day. The pet priests of her own particular show-church were the only perfect beings left upon God's earth; and perhaps it was as well that she had them—and Estelle, always Estelle—to believe in. They did her no harm; they kept her heart, somewhat disposed to be stony, from wholly ossifying; and though they believed in the pomps and vanities of the Church, and wore smart vestments, and reverenced all the saints in the calendar, they were simple-headed, simple-hearted people to know; and they gave the austere lady a great deal of mission work to perform, which she did very badly on the whole. She was essentially unsympathetic, and hard of belief in human affliction, though she

had experienced much of it herself, and had found it strike home. But then no one had had such troubles as hers, she thought; and the recapitulation of little miseries did not affect her. These grumblers should have suffered as she had suffered! What was the loss of a little money, of a little work, of a little health, to the loss of confidence in a man to whom she had given all her heart and soul, whom she had loved blindly and faithfully.

This to herself, for Mrs. Dangerfield never complained outwardly. Estelle, the fair-haired, white-faced, pensive, gawky girl, believed her mother a model of peace and resignation, and seemed to strive in every way to imitate her; and being apparently a maiden with no will of her own, and no originality of character, and no life beyond her own grand house, she became naturally a copyist. 'How like her mother,' people said; and, though she was unlike her in many things, still the resemblance so far as deportment went, and little tricks of manner, was remarkable in a girl of fourteen.

Hence the house in Regent's Park was scarce-

ly a lively edifice, in the common acceptation of the term; the servants voted it 'orful slow,' and only the serious ones—plucked from the advertisements of highly respectable and exceedingly sound religious periodicals—remained to add to the stock of perfectibility on the premises, and they averaged about three months of it before giving 'the old girl' warning.

It was at the door of this house that one, Daniel Overdown, the working-man who had escaped death, when a government secretary was done for—such are the ridiculous inconsistencies of this sublunary sphere—stood one evening waiting for admittance. He had knocked several times, but he had arrived late and the whole household was at prayers. There had been no one to attend upon him till the fifth summons, when, being a trifle irritable, he had nearly battered-in the panels, as a final appeal to the understandings of the worthy souls within. Then, and not till then, a pale young man, with smooth hair, and in deep black, opened the door and stood in rigid uprightness before the applicant.

'Is Mrs. Dangerfield in?' asked Daniel Overdown.

'She is h'in, but she will see no one at this time of the hevening.'

'No one?'

'I said "No one."'

'I hope she will see me,' said Mr. Overdown; 'it's not particularly late, and I have come some distance.'

'In the morning, after ten, you can see the lady, not now. Oh! dear, no,' added the servant, very firm on this point.

'Why not?' asked Daniel Overdown, sharply.

'It's the rule of the establishment, and the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield never alters her rules for nobody. She'll see anybody at ten to-morrow—a dozen of you, two dozen if you like—but it's too late now.'

'I don't see that.'

'What!' said the domestic, with a half-shriek of amazement, 'don't you understand yet?'

'No, I don't.'

Daniel Overdown was in every-day costume—in work-a-day clothes, that did not entitle

him to any respect from servants of extensive establishments who wore superfine black, and so he did not get it. Still he was not daunted, he was an obstinate man, who could fight his own battles when the occasion seemed necessary.

He marched into the hall in lieu of going down a steep flight of stone steps on to the pavement again.

'Tell your mistress,' he said, very firmly, 'that I will take my orders from her; that my name's Daniel Overdown, and my business is of importance, and will not bear delay.'

'Oh! that's it. Daniel what's your name, did you say?'

'Overdown—the man who met with the accident in Derbyshire at the same time as Mr. Dangerfield.'

'Oh! indeed,' said the man, after a long stare at Mr. Overdown. 'Will you wait here a moment?'

The servant departed, after whispering instructions on the stairs to servant number two, to keep an eye on 'the cove in corduroys;' and

returned, not too readily, several minutes afterwards.

'Mrs. Dangerfield will see you, if you please to step this way,' he said, almost politely.

CHAPTER II.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

Mr. Daniel Overdown was not shown into the great drawing-room, where prayers had been read by the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield to her daughter Estelle, to her father—at that time staying on a visit to her—and to the servants *en masse;* he was conducted into a half museum, half library, on the first floor, where he was left to await the arrival of the lady whose presence he had sought.

It was a large room that, two years and more ago, had been the favourite sanctum of Paul Erasmus Wilberforce Dangerfield, Esq., the cavern wherein he had hidden himself many a weary hour on the plea of work and study of books, and of official business, and where he had

fenced and fought with grim truths, of which no one in the house had dreamed.

Mr. Overdown surveyed the apartment critically, and, as Mrs. Dangerfield did not enter an appearance very quickly, he walked to the books on the shelves, and read the titles of the volumes, till a trophy of ancient swords and pistols in the background awakened a new spirit of inquiry; and here, testing sword-blades and snapping pistol-locks, was he discovered some five minutes afterwards.

Mrs. Dangerfield and her father discovered him. They had entered arm-in-arm, the father leaning on the daughter's arm—a short, spare, thin-faced, sharp-featured, high-stocked man, eaten up by gout just then, and dragging one slippered foot with much difficulty along with him into the room.

'Good evening,' said Mr. Overdown, making a very respectful bow, before restoring three or four pistols and half-a-dozen swords to their places, which he did carefully and slowly, like a man not at all put out by being found inspecting his neighbour's goods.

'I am sorry to have kept you waiting,' Mrs. Dangerfield said, politely, as she escorted her father into a large library chair, into which he subsided with difficulty, and then stared hard at the intruder with his two thin, white hands clasped together, as though he had not done praying yet, and was going to finish off his devotions before proceeding to business.

'Pray, don't mention it,' answered Mr. Overdown. 'I found something to interest me —by your leave'—he added, putting away the last sword; 'a something in my way, that suggested the work left behind in Birmingham.'

'You come from Birmingham?'

'Yes.'

'And were at Gravesly.'

'Yes.'

'Will you be seated?'

'Thank you, I will.'

Daniel Overdown sat down, thrust his cap into the capacious pocket of a heavy pilot coat, and then looked from Mrs. Dangerfield to the starchy and clean old gentleman facing him.

It was a sharp, comprehensive glance that seemed to ask the reason for the gentleman's presence, and even to suggest the desirability of his absence, for Mrs. Dangerfield, seated now at the table, trifling with an ivory paper-knife, said, half in explanation,

'My father, Lord Redclove. You may speak before him in perfect confidence.'

'Oh, Lord Redclove; indeed!' he said, somewhat jerkily. He was surprised at the advent of a real lord, but hardly disturbed by it; and he made a little bow, which his lordship did not condescend to return—possibly had not seen, for he was looking down on the carpet and still pressing the tips of all his finger's together.

There was a pause, and Mrs. Dangerfield left it to Mr. Overdown to continue the conversation, and state the nature of his business. She did not ask what had brought him to the house, she might already guess that it appertained to a terrible time of past calamity, but there was no curiosity or anxiety expressed upon her handsome, passive face. He had seen a statue

with more interest stamped upon its marble countenance. Perhaps she thought he had come to ask assistance from her, and for himself, and that kept him tongue-tied. That would not do, at any rate.

He gave a quick cough at last, and began. Even then he did not dash at the subject uppermost in his mind, but led up to it for the lady's sake, though she never knew that, and never thanked him for it. He was a considerate man, after his fashion.

'It is two years ago, lady, since you and I met in a little village in Derbyshire,' he said.

The lady's long lashes quivered faintly, but she made no reply.

'You were in trouble then, with a bigger trouble not far off, and I was sorry to see it. In my own humble way, of course,' he added, deferentially, as he fancied, keen observer that he was, that the face grew colder and prouder as he gazed at it; 'but still sorry for anyone with a mind bothered by doubts as yours was.'

'That time is past, sir,' she said, severely; 'you have not called here to tell me of your sorrow.'

'No, that's true.'

The man was still perplexed, it was evident; he had a difficult task before him, and, in the face of this strong apathy, he scarcely knew how to set about it.

'You asked me several questions, if you remember, Mrs. Dangerfield; you were suspicious of me—imagined I was in your husband's confidence, and so forth.'

'I have not forgotten.'

'At the time I could not have answered one question to set your mind at rest, or make it more uneasy. Mr. Dangerfield's life was as much a mystery to me as any of those Greek books. What he wanted at Culverley, Heaven and himself knew, not I, at that time. Now,' he added, after a slight pause, 'had you asked me twenty-four hours afterwards, I should have been better informed, if equally uncommunicative.'

Mrs. Dangerfield's curiosity was not aroused

or else she had become of late days very self-repressive. She did not change colour, did not raise her eyelids from the dark, lustrous eyes, did not glance at him, but fidgeted with the paper-knife, and listened; that was all. Mrs. Dangerfield's father was looking at the speaker again, with great intentness in his keen grey eyes, but Daniel Overdown did not take heed of him. He had given fair warning that his visit there was connected with the past, and this woman, shrouded in black crape, must be prepared now for something which he had come from Birmingham to say.

Lord Redclove spoke at last, but with considerable politeness, to his daughter.

'Frances, if you would allow me to withdraw, I think that you will be perfectly safe with this young man; and there may be details of Paul's past life which you might even prefer my not listening to.'

'There is nothing to conceal,' she murmured; 'you know all—you guessed all long ago.'

'But still there may be little facts—little incidents—which——'

He paused, and she answered his unfinished sentence very quickly.

'No. Stay, please; I would prefer your not leaving me,' she said.

'Very well,' said Lord Redclove, with great urbanity. Then he looked towards Mr. Overdown, by way of permission to resume his narrative, and Mr. Overdown continued:

'I think I could have got over this uncomfortable job better without you, sir,' he said, bluntly, and forgetting his lordship's title utterly; forgetting even that he had been already informed the gentleman was a lord; 'what relates to the husband had better be told to the wife, and left for her to consider—at least that is my way of looking at it; but it is a complicated case, and who sees the best way out of it, has more brains than I have.'

'Pray, never mind your brains, my good man; you have heard that Mrs. Dangerfield requests my company at this juncture,' said Lord Redclove, scarcely above his breath.

'Yes, I have heard it. But you are *her* father, you see, not his. I wish to Heaven you had been his,' he blurted forth.

Mrs. Dangerfield shivered at this exclamation, and Lord Redclove said, coolly,

'Mr. Dangerfield's father has been dead some years.'

'And his mother?'

'His mother is in a lunatic asylum, poor woman,' Lord Redclove condescended to explain.

'Ah! that's bad,' said Daniel Overdown; 'anything's better than that, in the way of ailments, I take it. Well, then, it's time we got to business.'

'Quite time,' assented Lord Redclove.

Daniel glanced at him again; he did not like his lordship suddenly assuming the post of spokesman—standing between himself and the dead man's wife; blocking up the way, as it were, to the heart he had been sanguine enough to think he could touch by the plain recital of a few miserable facts. He had a strong fear now upon him that he should fail in his mission, and that it would be this sharp-faced man's fault, unless he were extra-clever, extra-earnest, and worked very hard in a cause foreign to his own life and pursuits.

He edged his chair nearer to the lady whom he was determined to address; and his lordship, for the first time, evinced considerable alacrity in the quick movement which placed his swollen foot out of harm's way of Mr. Overdown's progress across the carpet.

'After you had left Gravesly—on the following morning Mr. Dangerfield sent for me.'

'You *were* in his confidence, then,' she said, with faint surprise.

'There you mistake, as I have said already,' he replied; 'but you had unsettled him; the nurse told me he could not rest, and there came to him in the morning the grim fact that he had changed for the worse. He wanted a friend and, oddly enough, he could only think of me—snatched at me, as a drowning man snatches at straws, they say. Strange, this?'

'He was a strange man,' murmured the widow, as if in excuse for his eccentric conduct.

'I have often fancied he was not quite right in his head that day, and that he thought some kind of tie, originating in the railway spill we had had together, existed between us: at all

events, he was hard-up for a confidant, and he took me for an honest man—which was correct enough, at least,' he added, naively.

'And he told you—' said Lord Redclove, becoming impatient, and anxious to get at the pith of the story.

'He wanted an important message to be delivered to friends he had at Culverley—he was travelling to Culverley when the smash occurred, you know?'

Mrs. Dangerfield made a faint inclination of her widow's cap towards the speaker. She was paler and sterner of aspect now, Daniel Overdown considered.

'He was in trouble about *them*, and they were in trouble when he left for Culverley; the mother was in the habit of receiving money annually from his hands; at times, a good deal of money. Neither mother nor children knew his real position from first to last; he was a mystery to them as to you—a miserable mystery enough; but there it was to work mischief both ways—a sword with two edges.'

'And you come at last to strike me with it!' said Mrs. Dangerfield, more mournfully than warmly, and yet with a little flutter of suppressed indignation in her voice.

'Well,' he answered, 'I would interest you, if possible, in these poor children.'

'Impossible,' she said, very passionately, at last.

'Don't say that.'

'Impossible.'

'His children who have done no harm, and whom only great care and some money may be able to save.'

'I would not see them or interfere in their affairs for the world,' said Mrs. Dangerfield, shuddering; 'I have never heard of them till now—they can never be anything but outcasts and lepers with no right to exist.'

The volcano had given sign of the fire within at last; the paper-knife snapped in two beneath the reckless hand, and the Regent's Park saint was more of a woman, and a deeply injured woman, than ordinary. She had not pardoned the poor sinner sleeping in his coffin. Daniel

Overdown saw this at once—how could he expect that she would have mercy on these offshoots of society rising up like ghosts from her husband's grave?

'There has been given them a right to exist, I suppose, madam,' said Daniel Overdown, gravely, 'and we must not——But there, I have not come to preach.'

'Certainly not, certainly not, my good man, we don't want any preaching here,' said Lord Redclove, who felt that he had had enough of it in that establishment from legitimate sources. 'Where is the mother of these—these—children? Why doesn't she look after them?'

'She's dead,' was the answer.

Mrs. Dangerfield had subsided again into quiescence; this time the safety valve had been securely fastened down, and only a faint elevation of the eyebrows was a sign of how every fresh item of news affected her.

'Dead,' echoed Lord Redclove, complacently, 'ah! well, that is perfectly satisfactory—we have no objection to that. Her children will be well looked after by the parish—all that rhodo-

montade which gets into the papers about parochial neglect is the merest fiction—they will be looked after carefully, I have no doubt, and be put in the way of earning a respectable living.'

'You know nothing about it, sir,' said Daniel Overdown, shortly.

Lord Redclove was astonished at this abrupt assertion, but he, too, had the gentlemanly art of self-repression admirably developed. He settled his chin in his voluminous white stock, and said,

'I should have thought that you, Mr. Overdown—a man of some intelligence, and above your class a little; a man of the world, too—might have considered that that lady,' pointing to his daughter, 'was the last person whom delicacy should have prompted you to visit under these objectionable circumstances.'

'It was his wish that I should come here some day, if the children were in trouble, or if the mother died; and his wish has been on my mind a good deal lately,' answered Daniel.

'Why did he not tell the woman——' began Mrs. Dangerfield.

'Pardon me, but he never saw her after his marriage with you,' said Daniel Overdown, interrupting her. 'I have just said so.'

'Pardon me, sir,' she said, haughtily, 'but I do not believe you.'

'I had it from Mr. Dangerfield's own lips, when lies would have been very hard to pass them. I had it from a dying woman who had asked forgiveness of her Maker at the eleventh hour, and got it,' he added, with impressive emphasis.

Mrs. Dangerfield shuddered again at Mr. Overdown's impiety, but did not comment upon it. She glanced towards her father, as if leaving the rest of the conversation to him, and crossed her hands, saint-wise, upon her bosom, although her hands pressed heavily upon the heart beneath, whose throbbings she was not quite able to subdue.

'It is a painful story,' said Lord Redclove, 'but we must not pursue it further. My daughter has quite made up her mind not to be dragged into this business, either morally or pecuniarily. I believe, my dear, I make this statement with your full permission?'

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Dangerfield, in a whisper again.

'And this lady is a mother, too,' muttered the mechanic, as he rose baffled in his mission, and not seeing his way ahead, clear-sighted man as he was in many things.

Mrs. Dangerfield rose with him, and was the first to quit the room without another question to her visitor, who opened the door for her with a strange exhibition of courtesy and allowed her to precede him. He bowed to her as she swept past him in her deep mourning for the man of whose last wish she had heard that night.

Daniel Overdown was following her, when Lord Redclove's voice, sharp and clear, stopped him on the threshold.

'Stay,' he said, peremptorily.

'What is the use ?'

'I wish it. I have something to say now.'

CHAPTER III.

FURTHER PARTICULARS.

DANIEL OVERDOWN looked back into the room and hesitated. He was not anxious to renew conversation with this man who had done his best, or his worst, to mar the fortunes of those in whom the mechanic had grown interested of late days.

'Don't go yet,' said Lord Redclove, 'men can speak more freely together. Favour me by resuming your place for a few minutes, if you please, Mr. Overbrown.'

'Over*down*—and at your service then,' said he, shutting the door and returning reluctantly to his seat.

Lord Redclove took his chin out of the white

folds of his cravat, and leaned forward with more animation on his aristocratic countenance.

'I don't think, young man, that you could have made a falser move in domestic policy than to come to a man's wife and ask assistance for the offspring of the man's mistress.'

'Why?' asked Overdown, laconically.

'You shut your eyes to woman's natural weakness—jealousy.'

'Ah! I don't understand women—I have had very little to do with them all my life,' said the mechanic, petulantly, 'they talk like children—and act like children.'

'With one or two bright exceptions in the History of England rather than in the history of human life,' added Lord Redclove, sententiously. 'But—to business.'

He leaned back in his old complacent attitude, and put the tips of his fingers together after his usual habit. Daniel Overdown, or his mission, interested the nobleman—perhaps he was a friend at the eleventh hour to help him after all, thought the gunsmith.

'You have not said anything about these waifs,' said Lord Redclove, dispassionately, 'and you can hardly expect me to take an interest in the children of a man who deceived my daughter all his life. Still, "Man is liable to err," says the philosopher, and I look at error myself compassionately, knowing how ridiculously natural it is, and what weak donkeys we all are.'

He shrugged his shoulders at some painful reminiscence which time had not weakened and age had rendered objectionable, and then asked almost with closed eyes, and in a tone more indolent and unnatural,

'How many are there?'

'Two.'

'Boys or girls?'

'A boy—and a girl.'

'Humph—awkward,' said Lord Redclove; 'what are they doing—where are they?'

'He—the boy,' said Daniel, after a moment's hesitation, not lost upon his questioner, for all his nonchalant attitude, 'is tramping about Liverpool earning a living as best he may, by

singing in public-houses and at the corners of streets.'

'Good God!'

'That's the truth of it.'

'How old is he?'

'Sixteen—perhaps a little more.'

'Too old a gamin to be snatched from the gutters,' muttered the nobleman.

'This is only of late days—for a few months, perhaps, and since his mother's death,' said Daniel, quickly; 'he was not brought up in that fashion—he is——'

And then Daniel came to a full stop.

'He is not to be trusted, I suppose?'

'Not yet,' confessed the mechanic, 'but then, sir, look at his chances—or, rather, at the chances against him. If we could save him from all this—get him to sea—send him into a new land, where there is more energy and less temptation—open out to him a new world altogether?'

'Have *you* tried to help him?'

'Once or twice.'

'Lately?'

'Lately I have been on strike,' said Daniel Overdown, 'and unable to help myself.'

'That's bad.'

'Yes, very bad.'

'You found means to get to London, seemingly?'

'I raised the means—on a watch,' added Daniel, coolly.

'And for this fool's-errand?'

'Yes. It was a promise to the father; and these children have harassed me of late days. It seemed easy to save them and yet so hard to get anyone to help me.'

'I daresay. Sensible people,' said Lord Redclove, caustically, 'leave the art of reforming the vagabond to those wise folk with nasty tastes, who have studied the vagabond all their lives. Let us come to the girl.'

'You don't see your way to do anything for the boy?' asked Overdown.

'Upon my honour, no.'

'Then I have nothing to tell you of the girl,' said Overdown, firmly, as he jumped to his feet again; 'her life will not affect you, only harden

your heart against her. I have not come to hold up two wretched orphans to the sneers of fine people. Good evening.'

'You are hasty, Mr. Overdown—you are acting injudiciously; you are not doing your best for the children,' said Lord Redclove.

Mr. Overdown paused again on his way to the door; perhaps he was not. This was an odd old man who said sharp things, and seemed dead to charitable impressions, but he was very curious, and probably rich enough to do something for the unfortunates. Moreover, Lord Redclove seemed a little excited now, despite his mocking tongue and hard manner; his white tie had got twisted under his ears by the restless motion of his chin, and the right hand, with the big diamond on it, was surely clutching his knee tightly. Ah! that was the pain of the gout, perhaps.

'I fear I have done my best, sir,' Daniel answered, sorrowfully; 'but I have failed. I should have trusted my case to Mr. Fayre's hands, as he wished it. I was too conceited about this.'

'Never mind Mr. Fayre. I don't know, and I don't care, who the devil *he* is, and there is no necessity to drag anyone else into the discussion. About the girl now?'

'I would rather not tell you, if you have made up your mind as firmly as your daughter has,' said Overdown, doubtfully.

'Well, then,' said his lordship, petulantly, 'I have not made up my mind.'

'Come, I am glad, sir, for both their sakes,' cried Daniel, cheerfully now; 'it did not seem fair that I should journey all this way, and bring the dead man's message, and be baulked altogether.'

'You cannot tell what seems fair at present. Where is the girl?' asked Lord Redclove, again.

'In prison,' answered the gunsmith.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESULT.

The communication was too much for Lord Redclove, or for that nobleman's good resolutions of being of benefit to the afflicted and distressed. Had Mr. Overdown taken down one of those old pistols in the trophy of arms before him, loaded it, and fired it at his lordship, he could not, to all appearance, have surprised and shocked the father of Mrs. Dangerfield more completely. Lord Redclove took a long, deep breath, his grey eyes protruded, as though a hand had gripped him by the throat, and his face was full of a horror and consternation that the gunsmith would have never given it credit for expressing, judging by its sphinx-like

stolidity of a few minutes back. Still it was a momentary shock—callous natures may be surprised at unforeseen times in this way—and, before Daniel Overdown had done wondering, his lordship was himself again. A figure in a phantasmagoria could not have changed more quickly, or been in greater contrast to its last grimace.

It was the old, smooth, calm voice, the old, calm deportment, that Daniel Overdown had to confront again. Curiosity had been satisfied; the girl's miserable fate shown; the story, minus the details, which Lord Redclove did not care to hear now, made plain from the beginning to the end.

'So bad as this,' said his lordship; 'so utterly past hope, both of them.'

'So bad as this, but not past hope,' answered the other.

'There is nothing to be done, my good man!'

'I perceive that now,' said Daniel, drily.

He was at the door again, when once more the short, sharp crack of Lord Redclove's voice brought him to a standstill.

'Stop a minute, can't you?'

Daniel stopped.

'You are a hasty and ill-tempered kind of young fellow,' his lordship continued, 'and are likely to do more harm than good in this Quixotic enterprise.'

'I do not think so.'

'There is no repose about you.'

'I am a working-man,' answered Overdown; 'I have no time for repose.'

'That is no reason why you should always be in such a devil of a hurry, sir,' remarked his lordship.

'Well, perhaps not.'

'Where are you going now?'

'Back to Birmingham.'

'What part of Birmingham?'

'700, Prosser Street.'

Lord Redclove was silent for a moment, and appeared to reflect upon this information. Then he said,

'The address is of no use to me, but I will bear it in mind.'

'Hadn't you better make a note of it?' suggested Dan.

'Why?'

'To-morrow it might enter your head to be merciful.'

'I am not an unmerciful man,' observed Lord Redclove, as if anxious to dispel any false impression which the visitor might have conceived of him.

'That is good news.'

'Still, as it is—don't fidget with that door-handle, man, but try to listen patiently, for God's sake,' he added, petulantly—'still, as it is, pray understand me once and for all, speaking for myself, as well as for the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield, that we respectfully, but positively, decline further discussion on the subject. The children are not entitled to our sympathy, and are even beyond our help. We do not desire to be troubled by them any more, we do not care to know anything about them, and we must not be annoyed at any future period by applications on their behalf.'

'Is that all you have to say, my lord?' asked the gunsmith.

'Yes, and I hope you understand.'

'Perfectly,' answered Mr. Overdown; 'and, if you had spoken out as plainly as this when you first came into the room, I might have saved you a heap of time.'

'I wished to learn all the facts,' repeated his lordship. 'I did not want you to tell your people that we had been too proud to hear you.'

'Only too proud to help—is that it?'

'Too wise,' corrected his lordship, 'assuredly too wise, my good fellow, to recognise a claim of this description.'

'Yes, you were the wrong lot to come to,' said Daniel Overdown.

'The wrong lot!' exclaimed the nobleman; 'great heavens, what an expression.'

'If his mother hadn't been in a mad-house, now,' continued Dan, reflectively, 'or there were any friends of his about the world to whom I could tell this story.'

'They would all laugh at you,' said Lord Redclove.

'Not to my face, I fancy,' answered Daniel, meaningly.

'Ah, well, it is not my business, I perceive; and so good evening, my good man,' concluded his lordship, airily. 'I wish you a mission more profitable to yourself on a future occasion.'

'And what shall I wish *you* in the future, sir, and when *your* time is up?' said Daniel, in a sharp, clear voice that startled the white-haired man again, though he only blinked at his questioner.

'I don't require any good wishes from you,' he said, haughtily enough now, 'and I shall be glad if you will retire.'

'I wish you a trifle more charity for yourself and your past than you have condescended to show for other folk—that's all;' and with this parting salutation Daniel Overdown shot out of the room.

Outside the apartment a new comer upon the scene aroused for the nonce a faint amount of interest. This was a young man of one or two-and-twenty, very sallow and very dark, who came up the carpeted stairs two steps at a time, as Daniel Overdown flew down them. The

new-comer was in haste, but he had time to look closely and curiously at the gunsmith as he passed him, and to change his position politely and adroitly from the centre of the stairs to the hand-rail, so that the man descending might not find him in the way, or topple him over in his downward rush. He even looked after Mr. Overdown without pausing in his ascent, but this extra attention was lost upon Daniel, who went, like a lapwing, out of the house, still burdened and perplexed by the problem now too deep for him to solve.

Meanwhile the dark young man walked briskly into the study, where Lord Redclove was sitting, with his hands clasped on his knees, and his shaggy white eyebrows lowering over his keen eyes.

'Ah! Hamilton,' the nobleman said, half reproachfully, 'you have come at last, then, to share the horrors of this dreadful house with me. How d'ye do?'

The two men shook hands together in languid fashion.

'I started from Paris an hour after your letter reached me,' said the youuger, as if by way of explanation.

'What the deuce did you want in Paris?' asked Lord Redclove, fretfully.

'I was hipped to death at the Cedars, and there were friends in Paris.'

'There are friends in London.'

Hamilton did not contradict this assertion, but he looked as if he doubted it.

'Have you seen your cousin Frances?' asked his lordship.

'Yes, uncle.'

'Is she praying again?' he asked, with a shiver.

'I don't know. She has a prayer-book in her lap, I fancy.'

'To think that this infernal gout should have seized me here, of all places in the world,' said Lord Redclove, fiercely.

'Where a daughter's kindness and attention must have been of inestimable service in your affliction, my lord,' added his nephew.

'Oh! yes, in their way; a little, perhaps,' asserted Lord Redclove; 'but you cannot conceive,

Hamilton—you have not the slightest conception —what this house is like. It runs over with clergymen; they are here at all hours of the day; they lunch here, dine here, pray here—they will not let even me alone. By God! they give me tracts!'

'You are a prisoner, and must bear with them for a while, uncle,' said the young man, laughing outright at last; 'but here is your nephew Hamilton to the rescue—a defender against the Faith!'

'Ah! well, well, I am glad you have come,' said the old man, with a sigh of relief; 'not that you will be of the slightest use to me, though; for,' he added, lowering his voice, 'I want all your tact, and power of observation, and acuteness—if you have any,' he added, drily—'turned in another direction.'

'I am at your service,' replied the dark young man, readily enough. 'What can I do?'

'You must start to-morrow for Liverpool.'

'That's an out-of-the-way place for me,' remarked Hamilton; 'but you have a particular reason for all this, of course?'

'A most important reason.'

'Doubtless,' replied his nephew. 'I am all attention.'

'It is the old business.'

'Ah!'

'It turns out that Paul Dangerfield had two children by that woman, and that both have gone to the bad.'

'Poor devils!' was Hamilton's reply.

'A man has been here about them to-night.'

'I met him jumping down the stairs, I think; a savage looking fellow.'

'A fellow who begged hard, but whom it would not be policy for us to encourage in any way,' replied Lord Redclove; 'we can't be for ever pestered with applications for assistance to these wretched waifs.'

'Certainly not,' asserted Hamilton, 'at least I should say not.'

'And Mrs. Dangerfield is very firm on this point, too,' added Lord Redclove.

'And very womanly—considering all things.'

'Yes—there is as little false sentiment about Frances as there is about me,' was the reply.

'She looks practically at life, and that is saying a great deal for a woman of four-and-thirty with a church on her mind. She hates the very mention of these outcasts' names.'

'I am not surprised.'

'For what have we to do with these miserables who spring up in this way to annoy the family —what *are* they to us?'

'Nothing.'

'And yet that troublesome, I might almost say impudent fellow who has just left me, thinks they are something to us, because Paul was anxious about them a few moments before he died—when a man is always absurdly incoherent —and implored him to come here under certain circumstances.'

'And those circumstances have arisen?' asked Hamilton.

'Yes, the children want help. The boy is on the streets, and the girl,' he added with a visible shudder, 'is in prison. A dreadful pair.'

'Very dreadful, I should say.'

'Still, I think,' he added, hesitatingly, 'I should like them to have one chance of bettering

themselves—and you have turned up at the exact moment to assist me in this matter.'

'In what way can I assist you, uncle?'

'I will tell you in a minute. Please, do not hurry me.'

Lord Redclove was in no particular haste to enter into the details of his plans; he was evidently perplexed still, and sat with his eyes closed, and with the tips of the fingers of his left hand still pressed against the tips of the fingers of his right hand, thinking out the position. He remained silent for so long a period that Hamilton ventured to remind him by a cough that he was not telling him anything at present.

The old man looked up keenly at this.

'I haven't gone to sleep,' he said. 'I am deliberating, Hamilton, but you are always in such an infernal state of effervescence,' said Lord Redclove, tetchily. 'There is not that fair amount of calm attention and regard for your superiors in years which I think I am entitled to expect from you.'

'I am sorry, my lord; I——'

'You can perceive very plainly I daresay,

when you come to perceive anything, that it is not politic to drag me personally into this affair,' he continued, 'that, in fact, to be mixed up in it, in any way, is to establish a precedent which might be very difficult, at some future time, to set aside or disown.'

'Yes—I think I see that,' was the prompt reply.

'Of course, I don't want to be worried. And I will not be worried, either.'

'I believe your lordship was never fond of worry.'

'Precisely so. But—who the devil is?'

'There are a few people, perhaps, who——'

'That'll do, Hamilton,' he interrupted. 'I am not sitting here to be enlivened by any of your abstruse dissertations on the most ridiculous subjects. They will not amuse me, and they will tire you very much. I had hoped you had dropped that objectionable habit of yours. I want,' he added, leaning over and touching his nephew's arm confidentially, 'you to listen, not talk. I will do the talking, with your kind approval, sir.'

'I am all attention,' said Hamilton, with the suspicion of a frown upon his dark face asserting itself for the first time.

'I want you to leave to-morrow for Liverpool,' said Lord Redclove, 'that I have told you, I think.'

'I have already had the honour to receive your lordship's commands in that direction,' the nephew replied, with possibly a shade too much politeness.

'You will find this boy of the name of Challis. There are plenty of police there to assist you. There will not be much difficulty in the search—you will see him for yourself, report to me by telegraph what he is doing and likely to do, and with whom he is. You will make every inquiry about the girl, who is in prison at present. They must have money, too, presently—I will arrange all that.'

'Very good.'

'You will see the girl in prison even—if it is possible.'

'Very well. You think of assisting them after all then, my lord?'

'To an extent,' was his uncle's cautious reply. 'To a certain extent, and under certain conditions that may be required of them.'

'Exactly.'

'I don't want the boy or girl to think that I have been talked or tricked out of as much as a penny-piece in their favour.'

'That may be difficult to conceal.'

'I do not want to appear interested—I am not interested, and I do not want that dreadful man from Birmingham to know anything of our intentions,' his lordship continued.

'Very well,' said Hamilton again.

'And, above all, I do not want your cousin Frances to know.'

'Not Frances, even?'

'No.'

'She might think presently you had deceived her in feigning a lack of interest in those children of Paul's, to whom your generous heart is now turning,' said Hamilton, gravely and earnestly, so gravely and earnestly that Lord Redclove shot a keen glance from beneath his bushy white eyebrows at the speaker.

'I have informed you just now that I am not interested,' said Lord Redclove, sharply, 'surely you do not imagine I am?'

'It is certainly the first time,' replied Hamilton, 'that I remember your lordship anxious to distribute charity to the undeserving. Taking it for granted,' he added, 'that these people are undeserving, of course.'

'You take too much for granted, Hamilton—always.'

'And with reference to money matters?'

'I will communicate with you by telegraph—"wire back," as those dreadful commercials say, I believe. You have not found out these children yet. When you have,' he added, 'let me know exactly every detail concerning them, and how far in your opinion they may be trusted.'

'I will do so.'

'Your opinion may not be worth a great deal, but you will be able to see, I hope, if they are worth keeping out of the way, or will promise to keep out of the way, and not harass the family any more by their unjustifiable appeals for sympathy.'

'I will do my best to supply you with every information.'

'I daresay you'll make a nice mess of it,' remarked the impolite old gentleman; 'you have too high an opinion of your own abilities, Hamilton, to succeed to my entire satisfaction, I am afraid. But,' he added, after a moment's further consideration of the subject, 'you're not quite a fool; far from a fool, I might say, at times,' he muttered.

'Probably there are many friends of yours who could do this business better,' snapped Hamilton.

'Oh, indubitably. But I have no friends to whom I can trust the secret of these children's existence. Friends never keep secrets, Hamilton; on the contrary, they run about and blaze them right and left—idiots with torches in a powder-mill. Hence,' he cried, apologetically, 'I entrust this mission to you, and good-luck go with you, as the Irish say.'

CHAPTER V.

IN SEARCH OF SAM CHALLIS.

Lord Redclove's instructions to his nephew having been tolerably explicit and sufficiently positive, Hamilton, despite many inward objections to the task thus suddenly imposed upon him, set out for Liverpool the next morning with an assumed air of cheerfulness, as though his uncle's behests were a pleasure as well as a duty to him.

Hamilton Redclove had much to expect from his uncle besides the title, which there seemed no keeping from him, and the land, which, by the law of entail, must fall to his share. He was a far-seeing young man in his way, naturally suave and agreeable, who took the good

things of life with an easy grace, and allowed very little to disturb his equanimity. He loved his uncle only tolerably well, though he took no small degree of pains to humour his peculiarities, out of pure respect to his late father's brother, some people thought; in order to win his way to a share in Lord Redclove's private possessions, invidious folk had been heard to assert.

Possibly there was a little affection and some self-consideration combined, if it were worth while to sift the motives of our young heir at this juncture; for Hamilton Redclove was only moderately selfish. He had been brought up with an idea that the world reverenced the Redcloves, and that the Redcloves were great folk on its surface; and that this notion had not utterly spoiled him, says a great deal for the natural disposition of the gentleman under discussion. That he had an excellent opinion of himself, we need not assert, after this shadowy analysis; and that there were eccentric traits of character crossing and re-crossing the common-place material of which he was chiefly

composed, our readers will see for themselves during the progress of this story. His uncle had every confidence in him—had helped to spoil him, the world said—and he had every confidence in his uncle. Hence these two agreed fairly well together, thanks to Hamilton's policy of making life pleasant by sinking all difference of opinion in deep water, and allowing his uncle plenty of fair sailing-room for his particular crotchets.

It is this young man, then—keen-witted, observant, not ill-natured—whom we find in the streets of Liverpool two nights following the date of our preceding chapter. He had an awkward mission to fulfil, and he set about it without a protest, not too anxious about results and not too curious concerning the motives which planted him in that busy, colossal city. There were disreputable people to be got rid of—to be coaxed, or bribed, into an eternal background, for his first cousin's sake; and Lord Redclove had trusted to his tact and energy. He should not like his lordship to trust in vain to those qualities; he would be glad to return

and say, 'I have been successful, the first difficulty is overcome; see how right you were to leave it in the hands of so clever a fellow as I am!'

Having begun his task, he had grown to a certain extent interested in the chase of, or the search for, one Samuel Challis—a nondescript being, supposed to be earning his living by concertina-playing in the streets of Liverpool, and to be discovered in those streets after dark by anyone vigilantly disposed. Hamilton had searched for himself the night before, and been baffled; hence his *amour propre* was piqued somewhat. He had not bargained for the size of Liverpool, the multiplicity of its streets, the labyrinthian character of its slums, and the pertinacity with which every gamin in Liverpool plays the concertina in his leisure moments, probably more for the benefit of his species, than with any hope of great gain for himself.

Hamilton Redclove, baffled in his search the first evening of his arrival, went to work in more business-like fashion on the second day. He called at the station-house, made many in-

quiries, and obtained one piece of information which was important—that Sam Challis was known to the police, very well known indeed. He had not been locked up, although he had been threatened with the terrors of a 'run in' more than half-a-dozen times. He was a youth who defied official authority, or who aggravated it by feigning obedience to its mandates for exactly as long a period as the official eye was upon him; a boy that would eventually come to grief, and who was hard to impress or move on. An insolent boy, moreover, was Sam Challis, with a great deal to say for himself, and for ever disposed to argue any point upon which society and he differed a little—the sleeping in a shady doorway, out of the cold winds which swept from the Mersey into the dark streets by the docks with a hundred thousand carving-knife power; the loitering on the landing-stage for a job, he said,—for a pocket-handkerchief, or a stray bundle, distrustful folk thought; the playing of lugubrious strains in a wrong key before public-houses, hotels, chapels—anywhere, until it was worth some one's while to bribe or scare him into the next street.

Hamilton was furnished with a description of him, but this availed him not—there were so many lank, hungry, bare-footed nomads about the Irish quarters of the town, where it was thought Sam might probably be discovered, between the hours of nine and twelve p.m. Sam had taken to the Irish quarter lately, and the Irish had taken to him; he had a connection amongst them on Saturday evenings when wages had been paid, and drink and wages were plentiful, but it was not in Hamilton's power to discover him, until a message arrived at his hotel—from a policeman, who secretly hoped that a liberal 'tip' would follow the information—that Samuel Challis was playing that evening at the 'Harp Tap,' in a certain narrow turning out of Byrom Street, doing deputy for the regular band, *i.e.*, old Cuppleditch, the fiddler, who had been struck 'all of a heap' with typhoid fever only the afternoon before.

Hamilton Redclove was offered the assistance of an able detective officer, but he politely declined it; he was warned that the 'Harp' was a disputatious establishment, and hardly a safe

place for a gentleman to visit who had anything to lose, but he said that he was not afraid of being hurt, and would prefer prosecuting his studies alone. Then a sovereign was exchanged, and the lord's nephew was left to his own resources.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock at night when Hamilton was close upon the object of his search. The streets were full of people, the innumerable drinking-houses of a hard-drinking quarter of the borough were crowded with their noisy, quarrelsome, poverty-stricken atoms of humanity. The gaslight was streaming from windows and doors, and from the huge, coloured glass barrels swung above the entrances; there were three or four fights in the roadway, the Irish brogue was rising high and fast above the Lancashire dialect, the police were busy, one or two were bleeding at the nose and on the cheek bones from an extra grand affray that had just been concluded as Hamilton arrived upon the scene, all the bustle and activity of drink, and squalor, and crime were rife in this strange portion of the town on that

especial occasion. It was a life new to the lord's nephew, and he watched it with interest, and with a courage, too, for which he had hardly given himself credit. It was an acting drama, and amused him—it was as completely out of his sphere as fairy-land, or rather as the demon-land in a pantomime where the shadows are dense and the masks are always hideous. These masks approached him closely at times and red eyes glared menacingly at him, but he pursued his way coolly to the end, his blood warmed a little by the novelty of his adventure.

He had been discreet enough to dress for the occasion, to disguise himself, as he considered, by taking a hothouse flower from his button hole, putting on a 'billy-cock' in lieu of his highly glazed silk hat from Bond Street, and turning up the collar of his black surtout; but he was a stranger in the midst of the crowd, and the crowd knew it.

He was conscious of being hustled at last, as he crossed a street where fifty men and boys were absorbed in the task of aggravating a bonnetless old Irishwoman, garrulous and blas-

phemous with whisky, and when he discovered a strange hand at his waistcoat pocket, feeling for the watch he had prudently left at his hotel, he was still self-possessed and cool. He seized the man nearest to him by the arm, and stopped him in the horse-play in which he was indulging.

'Where is the "Harp Tap," mate?' he asked, with easy familiarity.

'"Arp"—what do you want at the "Arp"?' snarled the man addressed.

'A pal. Here's a tanner for showing me the place,' said Hamilton, producing the sixpence with alacrity.'

'Right yer air. Come on—this way, yer honor. "Arp," yer said—didn't yer? Gord's truth, there it is, staring yer in yer face, all the while, at the top of the blessed street yonder. Thankee.'

The man had indicated the house in question, and Hamilton went up a narrow turning, thick with road and vegetable refuse, towards a light burning in a red glass lamp—a danger signal that made him pause for the first time.

'I don't particularly admire the look of it,' he said, to himself, but he went on slowly again till the 'Harp' was reached, and he discovered it to be a grimy public house, with swing glass doors that as they opened and shut disclosed a bar beyond, where men and women were drinking, and a partition behind which was a babel of sound, of stamping of feet, and hoarse shouting, and women's cockatoo screeching, and the asthmatic grind, grind of a concertina attempting a polka kind of air with indifferent success.

Hamilton Redclove leaned his back against the opposite house, and thought he liked the look of the 'Harp' less than ever on a closer acquaintance, and regretted now that the services of the detective had not been engaged when the chance had presented itself a short time since. He was tolerably brave, but he did not care to face poor humanity—especially Irish humanity—in its cups, and when disposed to pick its own quarrels with a well-to-do Saxon. He was alone in an awful world of which he had only read in books and knew nothing per-

sonally, and for a whim of his uncle's, which might change at a moment's notice, as his lordship's whims did occasionally, he was expected to risk his own respectable neck. He did not quite relish entering the 'Harp'—but then he did not care to abandon the quest now that he was on the brink of discovery.

'Here goes,' he said at last, courageously—and the step required a considerable amount of moral courage for a young man of his degree. 'They can't murder a man to polka music, I suppose, and I have not brought much to be robbed of.'

He crossed the road and entered the tavern—pushing back the spring doors, and forcing his way through the dram-drinkers to the hot stifling room beyond, where women with bare feet and men with Lancashire clogs seemed endeavouring to shake the house down by the vigour of their dancing. The place was heavy with tobacco fumes, and it was not at once that Hamilton became accustomed to the atmosphere, the stifling heat, and the blinding cloud of smoke and dust that rose up as from a smoul-

dering fire to choke the inmates. He groped his way towards the end of the room where the music sounded—men pushed against him again, and women snatched at his arm, laughed in his face and asked him for drink; but he passed on towards the musician and sat down in a vacant chair at the table on which the concertina-player was grotesquely perched.

At the same time as Hamilton Redclove looked at the performer, the performer looked down at him, and two pairs of dark eyes met sharply and critically. Each took stock of the other, and each was puzzled in his turn at the long and curious stare at him.

It was thus Hamilton Redclove and Samuel Challis met for the first time in their strange lives.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE 'HARP.'

INTERESTED as he was in the advent of the stranger, Sam Challis continued to play his concertina with emphasis, swinging it to the right and left and above his head, keeping time tolerably well, but unpleasantly inaccurate as regarded his notes. When he had grown tired of inspecting the young man at the table, he watched the audience furtively, his gaze shifting with wonderful rapidity from one group of dancers to another, from the dancers to the drinkers at the side tables, from the drinkers to the bar beyond the partition, over which, by a curious elongation of his neck, he could just peer from the elevated position he had assumed.

In that half-eager, half-watchful, wholly restless look he reminded Hamilton of some caged animal, doubtful which amongst its visitors before the iron bars would cast a scrap of food to it in due course. There was anxiety in the gaze, and there was evidently hunger, and no shrill laugh or shriller cry—and he accompanied his instrument with both in an excited fashion—could rob him of either expression as he played on to the riotous crew below his level.

He was a tall lad, between sixteen and seventeen years of age, very white and thin, and ragged and dirty, with bare feet, like the women who danced and shrieked about the room, and with an extraordinary crop of black matted hair which hung over his forehead and about his ears and eyes, a tangled and uncombable mane that the stoutest-hearted barber in Byrom Street would have shuddered in despair at conquering. He appeared to be in good spirits; hunger and anxiety and 'bad luck' had not quenched the elasticity of youth, even in this outcast playing for a supper and the price of a night's lodging, to be subscribed by the general

company when their charitable feelings allowed them to be liberal, or else he was a good actor, and hid the sorrows at his young heart by a sharp jest or a well-timed laugh. There was a picturesqueness, too, about him that his quaint attitude encouraged, and the surroundings did not wholly detract from; in the murky atmosphere, and with the background of a shabby red curtain hanging by a window in the rear, an artist might have made something of his Murillo-like figure. In a gilt frame and drawn to the life, he would have been worth money to the connoisseur, but, in the flesh and at that present moment, Sam Challis was exactly worth three-half-pence.

He wound up his performance on the concertina by an elaborate flourish of the instrument round his head, and when the dancers had ceased and everybody was shouting and swearing at once, as they walked up and down the room or struggled towards the bar without, his voice, shrill as a bell, rang out with a startling distinctness and even mournfulness,

'Remember the music, ladies and gents,

please. Don't forget the lad who finds the music, please.'

There was only one response on this occasion, and that came from a girl as haggard as himself and with a check shawl twisted about her head and shoulders.

'If yer don't play better next time, Sammy, I'll claw the life out o' yer ugly carkis, mind me now.'

As she passed him, she jumped up, and made a playful, but spiteful scratch at his countenance, which he jerked back adroitly out of harm's way.

'Aisy with you, Jenny, or I'll niver take you next Sunday to New Brighton,' he said, laughingly, at which remark Jenny laughed too, and went on, arms akimbo, down the room.

Sam Challis turned his attention to the newcomer, spellbound or dumbfounded by the company upon which he had intruded, and endeavouring vainly now to shape forth his course of action, which was not so easy a task as he had bargained for. Hamilton was so deep in thought that the musician's voice, close to his

ear, made him jump a little, Sam having leaned forward and downward to address the stranger.

'Hard lines this—eh, guv'nor?' he said, in a low voice.

'Yes,' replied Hamilton, when he had recovered his composure, 'hard lines certainly.'

'But, then, what's a fellow to do, but make the best of his musical education,' he said, drily.

Hamilton was conscious that the boy was speaking ironically, and he was conscious, too, that the tone and accent of the speaker were at variance with the harsh resonant voice of a moment since.

'Can you live by these means?' asked Hamilton, shivering a little, as a feverish dirty hand was laid familiarly on his shoulder.

'I grub on; I am not extravagant in my diet or my dress,' he said, kicking out his bare legs by way of demonstration. 'I have my ups and downs in life, sir—now it's the downs, and I play to the wild Irish.'

He laughed again, showing a row of strong,

white teeth; he sounded a chord on his concertina; he gave another plaintive cry of, 'Remember the music, please,' and then he leaned towards Hamilton again.

'What little game brings you here, my swell?' he asked, more insolently. 'This isn't the place for you, and people who come prying into Larry's crib have been known to get it hot, and wished they'd stayed away, long before the night was over. Twig?'

'I twig,' answered Hamilton, echoing the youth's slangy interrogation; 'but I'm not prying.'

'Come to be amused, p'raps?'

'Partly.'

'You'd better dance, then. Here, hi—Madge,' he called forth, 'here's a pard'ner——'

'Hold your row, please,' exclaimed Hamilton, in natural alarm. 'I come here to be amused; partly by seeing this life, but partly to be of help to anyone in distress, and who deserves help.'

'Got coal tickets and penny tracts in your pocket?'

'No—money!' said Hamilton, quietly.

The youth's eyes dilated, and he dropped his voice at once.

'Hand it over,' he said, harshly, 'we're mighty short of the article about here.'

'Not in this place, but where I can speak to you presently,' said Hamilton.

Sam looked very sharply at him, and so strong a suspicion of distrust settled on the pale soiled face, that Hamilton said, quickly,

'I am here to be of help to one, Sam Challis, who some time ago lost his mother down in Culverley.'

CHAPTER VII.

IS IT TOO LATE?

THE announcement with which our last chapter concluded, and which Hamilton Redclove made to Samuel Challis, was a great surprise to the last-mentioned gentleman, and his coolness of demeanour, his easy indifference to 'the surroundings,' to his own position in life, to the patronage of the man who had ventured in search of him was, for the first time, seriously disturbed. He had not expected this, or anything like this.

The past was nothing to him, save as it might affect one being presently who seemed cut adrift from it as remorselessly as he had been; there was no one who belonged to it but *her*, or, as he thought, would ever speak of it

again to him. It was sunk deep in the waters of life, with a big stone round it to keep it from ever rising to the surface, he had thought. And now this swell, who fancied, like a fool, he was in disguise and very unlike a swell, this amateur detective, who told by his manner what he was to every pair of lynx eyes turned in his direction, had stepped, as from the grave, to scare him with his mother's name, and with the proffer of help to the son of that dead mother.

He was *not* dreaming, surely? This was not the result of sitting up all night with old Cuppleditch, and nursing him when his daughter was at the pubs, and doing his work at the 'Harp,' and altogether wearing himself to death? This spick-and-span, clean-shirted party could not be a dream-figure, although as much out of place as one, and acting and talking with a dream-like inconsistency, the lad thought—after his own fashion of thinking. The men and women were laughing, talking, screaming, smoking, swearing, quarrelling, the Babel of sound was all real, the drink was genuine, there was a real 'bobby' looking in at

the door yonder, with his gimlet-eyes fixed on Hamilton as though he had an interest in him, and had been told to keep an eye upon him.

Sam Challis took time to consider the position before he answered off-hand. If this was 'a plant,' it was a queer one, and no mistake. It was without an object, so far as he could make out, and yet, without an object, why should the man have come in search of him? There had been many mysteries in that past, he knew; he had not troubled himself about them, being a reckless 'fly-away' lad, without much thought of anything save his own wilful self; he had left all mystery to his mother, and to his sister, who was a year his senior, and this man might be a part of it—*was* assuredly a part of it. That being settled in his mind, it behoved him to be on his guard, to make quite sure of the intentions of the party who had tracked him to the 'Harp,' to cross-examine him, in his turn, if it were necessary, and to profit by any well-meant service presently, and if all was square and above-board, and 'no kid about it,' as he would pro-

bably have expressed it, in the miserable street-slang of which he had become a proficient in his latter days.

Presently he began to sound several chords on his concertina, noisily and briskly, in order to drown the voices of his companion and himself.

'And this isn't a dodge?' he said.

'On my honour, no.'

'And you're not in the police, or one of the reformatory coves, or a missionary bloke?'

'Neither.'

'And you've come to be of help to me, Sam Challis?'

'Yes.'

'You don't know a Brummagem man of the name of Overdown, I suppose? Oh, no, not at all,' he said, with a spasmodic laugh, and a knowing wink of his left eye.

'I do not know anyone of the name of Overdown.'

'Ah, well,' said Sam, very thoughtfully, 'he's not a bad sort, after all; he means well, though he preaches a sight too much. He was good to

my mother when there was nobody else to come forward with a kind word, and she was dying sharp, when I was away, and Aggie was away, too,' he added, after a pause, and with several new and very harsh chords upon his instrument.

'I am ready to help you without preaching,' said Hamilton.

'Thankee,' said the other, still sceptical of Hamilton's good faith.

'Not because *I* am interested in you,' added Hamilton, coolly, and with emphasis; 'but because a friend of your mother's sends me to this place.'

'Oh! that's it,' Sam said, with another sharp glance at Hamilton. 'She *had* lots of friends once, but they cut away mighty fast before I knew anything about them. They—are you going to stand any drink before I begin again?'

'What drink will you take?' said Hamilton.

'Oh! the real tipple—Irish whisky, neat. That puts life into a man—"a drop of the crater,"

as these poor devils call it. Here, Joe,' he called out, 'two four's of Irish, for this gent and myself, and look sharp, for the respectable company can't be kept waiting all night for their music.'

He winked at Hamilton again—he could afford to take him into his confidence, and show him that he laughed at his audience, and thought himself above it. There was a levity, even a boldness, about Samuel Challis that was not to be wondered at, considering the grim school in which he had been reared of late days, and how genteel society had quickly turned its back upon him.

The whisky was brought and paid for, and Sam took his glass and tilted the contents down his throat with the air and ease of a dram-drinker thrice his years; his eyes brightened and his spirits rose several degrees at once. He was in luck's way to-night; if he had had nothing but a crust of bread to eat within the last fourteen hours, here was good drink to his rescue. He had got that much out of the 'swell,' and if the rest *was* a dream—'all gammon!'—

why, it did not matter a great deal. He was safe for a few hours, at any rate.

He struck up another tune—an Irish jig, which appealed at once to the feelings of his audience, who yelled and jumped to and fro, and came in ugly rushes against the tables and forms, and knocked over Hamilton's whisky, a calamity which that gentleman was glad to witness, not seeing how to get rid of it without offence to the feelings of the establishment. It was a very vigorous dance, and, when it was completed, Sam Challis set up his howl for a pecuniary reward again, and on this occasion a stray copper or two fell to his share. Hamilton was becoming uncomfortably conspicuous, too; the novelty of his appearance had not worn off, and the company was inclined to intrude now—to ask for drink—for a song—for anything that would show them that he had not come to spy upon the poor Irish, or ridicule them in their moments of innocent leisure.

'Stand drink,' whispered Sam Challis, as the wild faces closed round Hamilton, who had turned a shade paler within the last few min-

utes; 'chaff is no good here,—not such chaff as yours, I mean,' he added, very contemptuously.

Hamilton 'stood drink' as advised, and, as everybody was glad to consume alcohol at the stranger's expense, there was less personality, but more uproar, followed by a considerable exhibition of friendliness which was suddenly evinced by hearty hand-shakings, and slappings on the back of the 'real gint' who had come to see them. He was one of the right sort shure, 'not a beggarly informer, nothing to do with the perlice, rot 'em; one of the real grit from Ould Ireland, with work to pay for under the green flag presently, Ooh-hooray! God save the gint and pass the whisky.'

'How am I to get out of this, Challis?' asked Hamilton, weary of his mission or his company; 'there is no talking to you here.'

'When I strike up again, and they're dancing, you can hook it,' was the inelegant advice proffered.

He was apparently not curious about the stranger any longer. All the information that

Hamilton had lately startled him with, the whisky might have driven out of his head again, for the interest he appeared to show.

'Where shall I find you in an hour's time?' asked Hamilton.

'I may be here still, or else looking up old Cuppleditch's typhus,' he replied. 'I can't say exactly. Depends upon bus'ness.'

'To-morrow?'

Sam looked hard at him again. This man really meant what he said then. There was no hoax at the bottom of it.

'You will find me in the morning on the landing-stage, if you want me,' he added, very carelessly.

Strangely hard, strangely indifferent to help, altogether strange was this Bohemian, thought Hamilton. What was to become of such a character? Surely Lord Redclove was right in considering that it was too late to help a scamp of that age. Lord Redclove had always thoroughly understood human nature. He was very wise.

'I will be there,' said Hamilton.

'All right,' was the easy answer; 'and any change you have handy now, you can leave with me, if you like. For the money market is tightish. That's newspaper lingo for you, and no mistake.'

'Can you read?'

'Read!' cried Sam; 'why, man, I am a scholar! I was brought up as well as you were, until I cut it of my own accord. This kind of life suits me better; see how it agrees with me,' he cried, bitterly, as he thrust out his bare, dirty feet, and brandished the concertina over his head.

The music had hardly sounded in the room before he was laughing loudly. Hamilton did not understand him; it had not fallen to his lot to meet such a character as this before, to sink to the depths of such terrible disreputability as glowered at him through the dust and smoke of the dancing den. Let him be gone, and think more deeply of human life and mortal misery from that hour; he had lived a year, and grown a year or two older surely, since he had quitted the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield's house on Uncle Redclove's mission.

When the dance had grown fast and furious, he edged away from the table towards the door of egress. He looked towards Samuel Challis, but the player would not heed him again. Sam was seemingly absorbed in his task, in the dancers, in everything save the young man, who stole away from the shadows and hastened back to his hotel, where the 'proprieties' restored him to himself, and where everything was not so like a horrible nightmare as had been his adventures of the last two hours.

The nightmare came back, however, for Sam Challis was on his mind. Hamilton saw him in his sleep later on, perched, like a graphic figure of Doré's, above the poverty and viciousness of the haunt wherein he had discovered him. He seemed to wake up with the discordant clash of the music in his ears, and then he slept no more, but lay and stared at the venetian blinds of his bed-room window, and at the daylight coming brighter and brighter between the green laths.

'How that fellow worries me,' he muttered; 'and yet, what is he to me?'

It was his uncle's logic, but he had not his uncle's coldness of heart yet. He was young still, and youth, thank heaven for it, has generous and rash and hot impulses, which the wisdom of old age might copy at times with advantage.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GOOD-LOOKING GIRL.

THE next morning Hamilton Redclove was on the famous landing-stage at Liverpool, but Sam Challis was not to be discovered off-hand. They were busy at the Mersey-side that day—a huge ship from America was landing its passengers when Hamilton arrived, another vessel outward bound was taking in its freight of humanity, and there was a dense mob of emigrants and emigrants' friends—the Irish element once more predominant—exchanging farewells and blessings and tears. The steamers were coming across from Birkenhead and other parts of the Cheshire coast, steamers were puffing away from Lancashire to Cheshire in return, bells were

ringing, voices shouting, all the turmoil and life and excitement of this big river were at their highest, and rendered Hamilton's task far from easy or comfortable.

He came upon Samuel Challis at last—as the emigrants melted away by degrees, one ragged and forlorn youth remained at the edge of the landing-stage, with his gaze directed to the swirling water, as if in its depths might lie all the peace and rest he had not been able to discover. This was the boy whom Hamilton had seen yesternight at the 'Harp.' In the broad daylight, with his rags flapping in the breeze, Sam Challis was less picturesque and more disreputable, and Hamilton felt a certain amount of reluctance in accosting him before the people for ever hustling by them. Sam did not look round; he was not anxious to find Hamilton; he left it to Hamilton to find him; there might be politeness in his reserve, a pride even in the attitude which this youth had adopted, with his face to the river, and his hands thrust to the depths of his empty pockets. He was tall for his age, a lithe and sinewy young fellow, and

Hamilton fancied he could perceive even a likeness to the dead father—the man who had been kind to him when he was a youth himself.

He shook off his objections to Master Challis, and went quickly to his side. The face, looking down at the water, did not turn in his direction until he had first spoken.

'You have come, then?' said Hamilton.

'I should have been here without you,' he replied, shortly.

'Have you been waiting long?'

'I am used to waiting.'

'Do you get work on the landing-stage?'

'Oh, for the matter of that, when I try hard,' was the careless reply; 'now and then, that is, when the reg'lars are not down upon me too much, I find something to do.'

'Have you found work to-day?'

'I haven't looked for it; I am waiting for a friend.'

'What friend is that?'

'A woman.'

'Indeed!' said Hamilton.

'She will come from over the river to me,' he said, thoughtfully; 'she will be sorry to see such a scarecrow waiting for her, but she would be more sorry, I fancy, if I wasn't here.'

'A sweetheart, Sam?' inquired Hamilton, lightly.

'Ay—no—my sweethearts are at the "Harp," and come out when the factories are shut, and the gas is lighted—rare girls they are, some of them—but this is——'

'A sister?' said Hamilton, quickly.

'What is that to do with you?' was the sharp rejoinder; 'your business is with me, I was given to understand.'

'With your sister, too—if she wants help.'

'Not your help,' said Sam, shaking his head; 'not anybody's, I hope. She'll get on in the world—she's clever—she's A 1, is Aggie Challis.'

Hamilton had heard from his uncle that the sister was in prison; she was in a country prison then—Chester Goal, perhaps—and this was her liberty day on which he had chanced. Here was an opportunity to be of service to both

brother and sister—to give them an opportunity of bettering themselves in life—to be free with Uncle Redclove's money, if there were the ghost of a probability that the money would be of benefit to either of them.

'Well—about yourself. Shall we get out of this fresh crowd?' asked Hamilton.

'I can't leave till she comes. You can say here as well as anywhere else what the devil you want with me?'

Sam spoke peevishly. Hamilton's interest in him *had* aroused him, at last—of course, there was a deep motive for all the trouble which this swell had taken to discover him and offer him assistance, and he would be as glad to know the reason now as to be assisted.

'I knew your father,' said Hamilton; 'he was a great friend of mine when I was a boy.'

'My father was!'

'Yes, and now it's my turn to be your friend.'

'I have only one friend, and she's coming yonder, from the other side of the Mersey to me,' he replied; then he added, slowly, 'so you knew my father?'

'Yes.'

'That's more than I did,' he said, with his old unpleasant laugh; 'I was packed off early to school, and he never came near any of us. When I was tired of school, I ran away from it and home, and *them*.'

'Them?' repeated Hamilton, interrogatively.

'Mother and Aggie. As for my father—well, I don't want to know anything about him now. What's the good?'

'We will proceed to business, then.'

'Yes, and be quick about it,' he added. 'If you have money to give away, give it, and good-morning. You can see, sir, I am not in first-rate circumstances. You don't want any proof of that?'

'I see it,' answered Hamilton.

'Your coin I pitched away last night, too, so I am as poor as ever—money doesn't stick to my fingers long, worse luck. Cuppleditch hooked it before morning.'

'Cuppleditch? Oh, the fiddler, for whom you were deputy, at the "Harp."'

'Yes—he's dead. Can't say,' he added, in a thicker voice, 'that I'm quite myself this morning, for he fought hard to live, and croaking fiddlers are out of my line. I told him I wouldn't have funked about it like him, but have been glad to get out of it all.'

'That's a hard thought for one beginning life, Sam.'

'It's a damned bad beginning, you see,' he replied, with an ugly frown that changed the whole character of his face, and rendered it sullen and forbidding.

'There is more than one beginning—at your age,' said Hamilton, sententiously.

'Look here, that's old Overdown's talk—the man you pretend not to know anything about. Cut it.'

'I have done.'

'That's a good job.'

'I promised you I wouldn't preach,' said Hamilton; 'now to perform. If, for your father's sake, I buy you a passage to America, and give you a good outfit, and a few pounds to start with in the new country, will you go?'

'Say that all again.'

Hamilton repeated the inquiry.

'Is it worth your while—or worth somebody else's while—to send me out of the country?' was the slow and cunning answer.

'No—it is not.'

'What would it be done for, then?'

'Charity.'

'All this out of charity!' cried Sam, ironically. '"The likes of that now," as the old women say down our court.'

'There is no design in offering you a chance in life,' Hamilton continued; 'but there is a wish to do it simply for your own sake. Think that.'

'Very well—I'll think what you like, to oblige you, though to think of America, all of a sudden, is sharpish work. Do you want me to make any promise to stay there?' he asked.

'Not any,' said Hamilton; 'come back when you please—and, if you come back an honest man, I shall be glad.'

'Sam Challis's first appearance in a new and original character!' he said, sarcastically. 'What a lark!'

'Why do you hesitate?'

'Oh, why!' he echoed; 'there's a little bit of a reason for that. I can't say "Yes" till Aggie comes, at all events.'

'She may not come, and I am anxious to get back to town.'

'She *is* coming,' said Sam, with a curious quaver in his voice; 'coming—now—at once—bang off the reel—after being so long away from me! Here she is—close—on board the steamer coming in from Birkenhead — see there!'

'I don't see—' began Hamilton, looking towards the steamer approaching that portion of the landing-stage on which they were standing. 'Do you mean that short young woman, in the torn blue shawl, with a basket?'

'Get out,' said Sam, still more excited and more uncomplimentary: 'what, that fat Cheshire chops! No, the lady in black silk—don't you see a tall, good-looking girl on the upper-deck there? That's Aggie.'

CHAPTER IX.

AGGIE.

Hamilton Redclove held his breath for awhile in astonishment. This Sam Challis's sister! What a contrast to the white-faced brother, shivering in his rags on the landing-stage, a wretched waif, shrunken from all the strength and grace of youth by the privations of the last twelve months!

Sam Challis's sister!—the girl he had been commissioned to help, worthy or unworthy, should the occasion present itself—the young woman from gaol, whom his uncle regarded as hopelessly cast adrift from the 'respectabilities,' and for whom there did not seem any chance of better days in the lurid shadow which a prison must infallibly cast upon them.

Hamilton looked again from Sam Challis to the sister. Yes, there was no error of identification, the tall girl was waving a black gloved hand to the vagrant at his side; her face was smiling, almost joyous, and what a sweet face it was, thought Hamilton, as the distance decreased between the vessel and the landing-stage, and one could see her clearly in the morning's sun.

She was very tall, although not of that striking height which was remarkable in his cousin the widow; a fair-haired, bright-faced girl of nineteen years, perhaps, with a smile rippling over every feature, and with her red lips parted with excitement, disclosing a double row of dainty white teeth. She was more like a girl coming back from boarding-school to friends and home and love, than a forlorn young woman branded with the stigma of the prison-house, and with a ticket-of-leave in her purse, along with her gratuity money and her papers. In this guise, and in this fashion, Hamilton Redclove had never expected to encounter her —it was a stranger meeting than with her

brother Sam. He was bewildered by it—it seemed part and parcel of a new mystery on which he was intruding, and which appeared to thrust back all the sleepiness and drone-age of his past existence which had been marked by nothing singular, by nothing bad or good, praiseworthy or blameable—the ordinary career of a well-to-do young man, with no particular vices or virtues worth mentioning. Strange that *he* should think he had entered on a new phase of existence, when dwelling on the mystery which encompassed Agnes Challis, whose life could be nothing to him, save that it perplexed him at the first glimpse of it.

As she stepped on to the landing-stage, and made her way through the crowd of passengers towards her brother, Sam Challis for the first time in Hamilton's experience of him, betrayed a sense of shame at meeting her, or else a something that was akin to pride in his eagerness to spare her a recognition in the full light of day. He shrank towards the bridge between the landing-stage and the roadway and the busy docks beyond, and crept slowly away

from her with downcast looks and head averted, taking no heed of Hamilton who was keeping step by his side.

Agnes Challis had overtaken her brother before he was clear of the landing-stage, however, and a musical voice said in his ear,

'Don't run away from me, Sam. Where are you going?—what, are *you* frightened of me, too?'

'I'll not speak to you here,' he muttered, without looking towards her, 'see what I have come down to already!'

'Ah! Sam—I am not proud!' she said, almost laughingly, and yet there might have been a ring of satire in her tones.

'Presently we'll talk—not now,' said Sam, in a hurried voice, and still with head averted, 'let us get away from these people, if we can, Aggie.'

He turned suddenly to Hamilton, with a half defiant, half beseeching manner.

'You'll go—you'll hook it away for half-an-hour or so?' he said, 'won't you?'

'Yes—if you wish it,' Hamilton replied.

'Who is this gentleman?' asked Agnes Challis, in surprise.

'I don't know who he is,' answered Sam, shortly, 'a somebody who wants to get me out of England, who talks of helping a fellow who has been always able—after a fashion, mind—to help himself.'

'That is strange,' said the girl, regarding Hamilton very steadily and critically, 'you come from Mr. Fayre, I suppose?'

Hamilton raised his hat, as to a lady of his own degree, and answered in the negative.

'A friend of Mr. Overdown's?' was her next inquiry, and with her two large clear hazel eyes bent on him still.

'No, Miss Challis,' he said again, 'a philanthropist on my own account, I may say—and at least one who is anxious to be of service to your brother.'

'There are more good people in the world than I thought there were two years ago,' she remarked, thoughtfully, 'I hope Sam has thanked you, sir.'

'Oh! yes,' said Hamilton, very readily.

'No—I haven't,' was Sam's response. 'I haven't had time to think of it—to make it all out as clearly as I shall do in an hour or two.'

'For an hour or two, then, we will ask this gentleman to be kind enough to leave us to ourselves,' was the quiet hint conveyed here.

Hamilton was perplexed still—on the threshold of his new discovery, new mystery, this odd couple might vanish away for good, and render his efforts unavailing, and himself for ever in their minds an object of suspicion.

'I may trust you both to meet me again,' he said.

The tall girl looked hard at him once more.

'Why both of us?' she asked.

'You will be glad to hear what I purpose doing for your brother—you may require help for yourself in the new life which you are beginning,' he blurted forth, not too discreetly.

'You are *not* from Mr. Fayre—or Mr. Overdown?' she asked again.

'No.'

'How do you know I am beginning a new life then?' was her quick inquiry.

'I think so—I hope so,' he replied.

'If I could go back to the old,' said the girl, clasping her hands together, and looking upwards suddenly, 'if I could begin the old again, and be as happy!'

Hamilton did not understand this—he had imagined hers a sad past life to be repented of and wept over, and the exclamation surprised him more than his features betrayed.

'Pardon me,' stammered Hamilton, 'but really—'

'We will meet you, sir—we will meet you,' she interrupted, hurriedly; 'come, Sam.'

'Shall I wait for you here?' asked Hamilton.

'I am a stranger to Liverpool,' was the reply, 'where is the North Western Railway Station?'

'Some distance from the river.'

'Wait for us there at two o'clock this afternoon—it will be more convenient, I think,' she said.

She bowed gracefully by way of dismissal to Hamilton, who once more found himself raising

his hat from his head as to a fine lady of his acquaintance. The interview was not quite closed, however, for Miss Challis who had turned away with her brother suddenly came towards him again with her old, steady, searching stare. It was a look that thrilled him with its earnestness and its fearlessness of expression.

The voice was clear and forcible as well as musical—there was not a lurking tremor in its tone to betray either shame or fear at the heart of the speaker.

'You are aware I am from prison?' she said, boldly.

'Ye—es—that is, I have heard——' Hamilton began, in some embarrassment.

'That is the only question which I wished to ask you,' she said, quietly; 'good morning.'

She had turned away again, and Hamilton watched her join her brother, and walk on by his side, with her gloved hand on his ragged sleeve, until a turn of the busy street shut her from his sight.

CHAPTER X.

'BEWARE OF THE GIRL.'

HAMILTON REDCLOVE had become excited over his new mission. There was more romance about it than he had bargained for; the Challises—brother and sister—had been discovered, and it was a difficult task to understand either of them. They were not grateful yet for the charity which his uncle had sent him down to Liverpool to dispense—moreover, they were suspicious of him, and saw a hidden meaning in his expedition and a motive in the background for that philanthropy with which he had surprised them.

Ordinary people, in this world, do not go very much out of their way to help the benighted, to unfasten their purse-strings and heart-strings in

the service of God's great army of the afflicted —why should this youth and his sister believe in him and his professions? Did he believe in them himself? Hardly. Did he believe in his uncle? Well, not so much as he could wish.

This was a spasmodic kind of benevolence, rather than real charity, and there was even policy at the bottom of the whole business which Lord Redclove had entrusted to him. In his daughter's interest, and for his daughter's peace of mind, it was his lordship's best move to get rid of this couple, to send them abroad or find them honest employment at home—anything, so that they might earn their own living, and not fancy they had a claim on a poor, weak father's possessions, duly devised by letters of administration to the wife legally married, and the one daughter lawfully begotten. It was not uncharacteristic of his lordship's manner to be deaf or satiric to Daniel Overdown's plans, and then set to work after his own wise fashion. It was even like his lordship to be sorry for the results, and to spend money to make things as comfortable as circumstances would permit. His

son-in-law, Dangerfield, had been a sad fool, heaven knew that, Lord Redclove had said piously and truthfully more than once of late days; but he had liked Dangerfield, and, as men run in the bulk, Dangerfield had been kind to his wife, although he had died—if that objectionable gunsmith were to be believed—with a very eccentric anxiety as to the people whom he had, during his life, kept discreetly in the shade. There had been a great deal of fuss made over a very common-place affair, and, if money now could smooth matters a little, Lord Redclove would not be sorry; if money could wipe these Challises for ever out of the records of the family, Lord Redclove would even be exceedingly glad.

Hamilton guessed this, knowing his uncle passing well, and hence the telegram despatched to his noble relative a few minutes after Miss Challis and her ragged brother had turned the corner of the street.

'*I have discovered both the Challises. They are distrustful of me and independent, but the youth may be persuaded to go to America, I think. He*

is in distress, the girl is not. May I tell all frankly? May I be as generous as I wish?'

Lord Redclove's answer reached Hamilton at the North Western Hotel, a short time before he sauntered into the big station by its side.

'*Tell nothing. Give what money you like, but let it be understood clearly and positively that it is for the first and last time. Beware of the girl.*'

Hamilton was brooding on this answer at the railway station, rejoicing in it partly, but shrugging his shoulders at the wise warning of age—as youth invariably does when the warning is not to its taste—when the girl herself came so quietly and quickly to his side that he started as at an apparition.

'You are punctual, Miss Challis,' he said, and up went his hand to his hat again, and off went the hat, before he remembered that this was *not* a lady, only a poor prison bird, coming out of its cage with clipped wings.

'I am compelled to be punctual; my train leaves Liverpool in half-an-hour, and we have something to explain,' she said.

Hamilton bowed. There was a great deal to

explain, if each would condescend to do so ; and he could not now be frank on his side, without being false to his uncle's trust.

'You are going to——' and Hamilton paused.

'To Birmingham,' she explained, 'where a friend I have never seen has promised to look after me till the opportunity to look after myself occurs in good time.'

'May I ask his name?'

'Certainly. Daniel Overdown,' was the ready answer.

'I do not know the gentleman.'

He had said this more than once before, and he said it now very readily—it would stave-off questions that might prove embarrassing, he thought, if he were firm on this point.

'So Sam tells me,' she said. 'You, I hear, also knew my father well?'

'Yes. He was very kind to me when I was young.'

'You have the advantage of me, sir,' she said, with a sad shade upon her face. 'I did not know my father. I believe he was kind to mother in his way; that is, with his money.

I have been told so,' she added, thoughtfully.

'Where is your brother?' asked Hamilton, as they walked up and down the broad stone platform of the railway station, the world about them too busy with its own affairs to take heed of a strange couple.

'He will be here presently,' was the answer. 'We have had a long talk together, and he has made up his mind to accept your kind offer of a passage to America.'

'I am glad to hear it,' responded Hamilton Redclove.

'Having once made up his mind, he is impatient to start,' she said; 'he was always impatient, poor fellow, and that may stand in his way in the new world as in the old, unless the first friend he meets sees the good that is in him as clearly as I do.'

'You have faith in your brother?' inquired her companion.

'Yes,' was the confident answer, 'I have.'

'And he has faith in you?'

'Yes. That is more remarkable, you think?'

she added, shrewdly, and with a faint smile flickering at the corners of her mouth.

'No, pardon me; I do not think that,' Hamilton hastened to reply.

'I have been in prison, you must remember,' she said, very frankly, again; 'and my brother Sam has still a character to lose!'

'Why don't you go abroad, and take care of him?' suggested Hamilton, 'with a home together, beginning new lives together, the world would open out before you both more brightly. In America, for instance, the past could be completely sunk.'

'Oh, sir, I do not wish to sink the past!' she cried, with a strange pride suddenly exhibiting itself; 'there were troubles in it, but there were happiness and love. I have it still to study.'

'To study,' echoed Hamilton.

'And there is nothing in it that I regret, or look back upon with shame,' she concluded, without heeding him.

'Nothing,' echoed Hamilton again, and again she took no heed of him. Her thoughts for an instant had gone from him, and from the bustle

of the big railway station, to the past of which he was ignorant, and to a world lying far away from his ken. Yes, it was a fine face—full of thought and confidence and even hope, he fancied, as the bright hazel eyes looked beyond him, and a tinge of colour rose to the cheeks which prison air had blanched of late days.

Nothing in the past to regret or look back upon with shame! What did she mean? thought Hamilton. What could this young woman mean by that?

CHAPTER XI.

BOTH GRATEFUL.

Was there no real shame in the offence for which this Aggie Challis had suffered imprisonment, thought Hamilton Redclove, or had she grown callous to society's punishment, and defiant of it, or was she, by one of those awful accidents of life which trip up the heels of honest folk at times, innocent of the crime for which she had suffered? He could believe she was, it was so fair-spoken a face, and with such a clear outlook from it, that his heart was touched to know its history.

She came back to herself suddenly.

'To go abroad with Sam,' she murmured.

'Yes, why not think of it seriously?'

'It is a temptation to speak of America, and of my taking care of my brother,' she said; 'but my mission in life lies in England, and my friends are all here.'

'You have friends then?'

'Mr. Overdown will be a friend, I am sure; I have confidence in him already, and I shall make more friends as I go on,' she replied; 'I have a habit of it. Why, I made friends in the prison, which they let me out of yesterday; plenty of them.'

'The sooner you drop them the better, I should say,' remarked her listener.

She laughed merrily for an instant, and to Hamilton's new surprise. It was a laugh that thrilled him, and was full of music.

'You would not say so if you knew them,' she said; 'but you don't want to know about them, or me, and we haven't time even if you had the inclination.'

'I'm not quite so sure of that.'

'Time is getting on, and Sam will be with us in five minutes. Now, about Sam?'

'I thought the question of your brother's

start in life was settled,' he replied more anxious concerning this new-comer on the scene than in the youth he had discovered last night at the 'Harp.'

'He is going to America at your suggestion and at your expense?' she said. 'Is not that the position?'

Hamilton nodded.

'And you wish me to believe, just as you wish my brother to believe, that this is a charitable freak on your part, without any motive save the wish to benefit your fellow-creatures,' she asked, 'your poorer brethren?'

'I have not said so,' Hamilton replied. 'I have already told you that your father, Mr. Dangerfield——'

'He was not called by that name,' she interrupted, quickly; 'my mother did not know him by that name.'

'Indeed!'

'For, at least,' she corrected, 'my mother never spoke of him by that name to me.'

'Well, well, he was kind to me in my youth, I was about to add.'

'It is gratitude, then, for past favours that has led you to seek my brother out?' was the next question that embarrassed him.

'Your brother and yourself.'

'You did not expect to see me,' she said.

'I should have sought you out next,' was the reply.

'Yours is a gratitude which I am too young to understand perhaps,' she said, and Hamilton felt himself blushing and evading her gaze. 'May I ask your name?'

'I would prefer you left me nameless,' Hamilton urged.

'An unknown benefactor, like the good stranger in the story books,' she said, almost satirically.

'It would have been easy to give a false name, and thus affect to satisfy your curiosity,' said Hamilton, in some confusion; 'but—but I cannot tell you a lie.'

She looked away from him for an instant, and then said,

'Thank you. It is as well there should be truth between us.'

'You suspect me, Miss Challis,' said Hamilton, 'and it is natural you should do so. But what motives can I have in being of assistance to your brother, but those which do me no discredit?'

'Neither discredit to you, nor to those who sent you, I hope,' replied Miss Challis, quickly; 'for this is no impromptu effort on your part, and it is bad acting to try to make me think it is. Still for your timely help to Sam, sinking now for want of help, I thank you, sir, with all my heart.'

She extended her hand to him, and he took it, shook it warmly, and resigned it. It was in his heart to tell her all, but he checked the impulse that was honest and fair in him. 'Beware of the girl,' seemed hissing in his ears, the warning of his uncle sent by the wires half an hour ago. He would keep his uncle's secret, if he would not follow implicitly his uncle's mandates. He had no intention of telling the good-looking girl before him that this assistance was for the first and last time in the lives of her and her brother. He would help them himself, if

help were needed, he thought, in the excitement of that moment, and under the spell of Aggie Challis. He would be very glad to help *her*, he was sure, at any time of her strange life.

'I don't know that I should have accepted your offer for Sam,' she said, thoughtfully, 'had I been able to see clearly ahead of me. But I return to the world a poor girl, and with only one dress to my back worth anything. This is it; I was arrested in it.'

Hamilton did not admire the persistent way in which Agnes Challis alluded to her prison life, though there seemed a motive in her manner of doing so, rather than a natural recklessness or defiance. Was she anxious to impress him with her antecedents?—to fix the fact on his memory whilst their interview lasted?

'I had my plans for Sam,' she continued, 'but your charity has altered them. Your idea is best; he goes to America, to the very place I have wished him to go, and where he may be of service to me, or himself, or another—who knows? He is not as good a scholar as he

might have been; he had not my application, my poor mother used to say,' she added, with quite a French shrug of her shoulders; 'and he was never fond of school, as I was. Oh! my grand old school. I wonder if the mistress has heard of the fate of her favourite pupil, and if it has shocked her very much.'

'But——'

'But let me understand all very clearly, please, before Sam comes,' she said, hurriedly now. 'You don't want a sketch of my life; I want a sketch of his. He goes to America—well, what then? Have you thought?'

'He is to take with him a sum which will keep him from poverty until a chance presents itself of occupation.'

'How much will it be?' she asked, in a business-like manner.

Hamilton had only settled this in his mind within the last few minutes. He would be liberal with his uncle's money; there was a pleasure in the act of distribution, and he had not much to spare from his own means just then. His uncle would elevate his shaggy, white eye-

brows presently, and tell him he had been infernally lavish of the cash; but the telegraphic message had left the matter in his hands.

'Two hundred pounds,' he said, in answer to the last question put to him.

Aggie Challis was surprised. She changed colour, and was a little short of breath for a while.

'That is a large sum for a youth to travel with,' she said, very thoughtfully, at last.

'Living is expensive in America; he may possibly go West, and seek his fortune there. He may be months before he settles down,' said Hamilton.

'To a hard fate, perhaps,' said Aggie. 'I don't know. I can't see the end of his life—it's beyond me. Two hundred pounds!'

'Will you take charge of some of it, and remit it to him at a future period, when you may think he requires it?' said Hamilton; 'if you consider it is unwise to trust him with this money all at once, it would be better policy for you to——'

'I will have nothing to do with it,' said the

girl, firmly. 'Sam is to be trusted; I could always trust him. It is the one chance he has ever had; it comes at a good time, and we are both grateful, God knows.'

The big eyes were raised towards the station-roof, the gloved hands were clasped together in gratitude to a greater Giver than Hamilton Redclove, and the fleeting attitude of reverence impressed and awed him. He was glad that he had come to Liverpool, and been of use in the world, probably for the first time in his life. This helping the outcast and forlorn was really very pleasant work, especially with other folk's money.

There was all the sensation of being a good Samaritan, without any of the expense attached to the assumption of the character, though, to do our young gentleman justice, this view of the case did not strike Hamilton at the moment.

CHAPTER XII.

A PARTING.

It was at this juncture that Samuel Challis re-appeared upon the scene. He had exchanged his rags for a decent suit of clothes, purchased at an outfitter's in the town; he had washed his face, and had his hair sheared, and was altogether a presentable being. The process had made him look taller, as he held his head more erect, with the consciousness of being more respectable. It was a difficult task to connect him with the wild scene at the 'Harp' tap that Hamilton had witnessed the preceding night.

He looked steadily at Hamilton, too—there was no hang-dog glance under the brows now,

no lurking defiance in the glitter of the dark eyes, no regarding a man well-dressed and respectable as an enemy to be wary of, or a 'toff' to scoff at. There was a likeness to the sister, too, that was evident in his new estate, but where it began or ended it was not easy to determine at a glance.

'Good day again, sir,' he said, respectfully, to Hamilton. 'Well, Aggie, is this the cheese? I mean,' he corrected, 'is this the cut and style suitable for a gentleman about to patronise the States with a look up?'

'There are plenty of pockets in the coat,' answered his sister, with a forced lightness of demeanour; for Hamilton, watching her rather than her brother, quickly detected a quivering of the lips.

'Yes, but there's nothing in them at present. Not,' he added to Hamilton, 'that that was intended for a hint, sir.'

'You must pay your sister back for the outfit, when you have funds at command, Sam,' Hamilton suggested.

'No,' said Aggie; 'that is my little contribution

to his new life. You do not object to my giving him a pilot coat?' she added to Hamilton.

'But——'

'But we have no time to discuss the question,' cried the sister; 'I must be in the train in ten more minutes.'

There was a pause, and she looked hard at her brother.

'I don't think we have anything further to say, Sam,' she said, hurriedly, almost nervously. 'You understand everything—and you *will* do your best.'

'Yes,' answered Sam, stoutly; 'I will.'

'Upon your honour—always?'

'Always—upon my honour, Ag.'

'And with God's help,' added Aggie Challis; 'and so that's well said, Sam. Now listen to me, not to the gentleman, for he's not quick in explaining matters, and every minute is precious to us. Our good friend here—for he must be our friend—sends you to the New World with more money than you have ever dreamed of; he comes to you and me like a fairy prince, with his hands crammed full of gold, and lends you

—LENDS YOU, Sam, understand, for you are to pay him back with interest, some day, every shilling that he has advanced—the sum of two hundred pounds.'

'Two—two hundred what?'

'Two hundred pounds.'

'Lord, save us! Do you mean it?'

'Yes,' said Hamilton.

Sam Challis was surprised indeed;—his lower jaw dropped, and his eyes blazed with amazement. Finally he turned pale, and looked as if he were going to faint.

'I don't make it out,' he muttered; 'you bind me to nothing?'

'No.'

'There are no conditions to all this, sir?'

'Only that you do your best with the money I give you,' answered the benefactor.

'That he lends you,' said the sister again; 'for, Sam, it should be your greatest effort—your greatest pride in life—to earn the money back again to pay this gentleman.'

'It shall be,' murmured Sam; 'I promise I will earn it.'

'We shall be able to find you easily, I think,' said Aggie to Hamilton, and to Hamilton's surprise; 'and till then, and under any circumstances which may have prompted you to seek us out, we are your grateful debtors.'

'But you stand aloof—you will take no favour at my hands,' said Hamilton.

'Oh, sir, let me repeat I have plenty of friends,' said Aggie Challis in reply; 'and here is one whom I have been expecting during the last half hour. He said he would come.'

Hamilton turned, and beheld a tall, lank man, closely cropped and clean-shaven, in the dress of a minister of the Church of England, advancing to our heroine—for this prison-bird is the heroine of our story, gentle readers. He seemed a man of sixty till he was close to them, and then he melted down to a stern-faced individual of four or five and forty years of age, who looked as if all the cares of the world were resting on his narrow shoulders.

'Good afternoon,' he said, huskily.

'Good afternoon. I was afraid you would be too late, Mr. Fayre,' she said, in a low voice to him.

'I said I should be here in time,' he answered, as if that assertion should have immediately dispelled any doubt of his coming; then his comprehensive glance took-in Hamilton coldly and critically, and passed onwards to Sam Challis, whom he condescended to address.

'Your sister has found you, then?' he said, in the same rasping tone.

'I found her,' was the reply.

'Are you going with her to Birmingham?'

'No,' answered Sam, and he edged away somewhat from his questioner. 'I start for America this afternoon.'

'To America? You!'

'This gentleman has been kind enough to promise my brother a passage to New York, and the means of living out there until he can obtain employment for himself,' Aggie hastened to explain.

'I hope the gentleman's generosity will not be misplaced,' said Mr. Fayre, very coldly; then he turned his back on Sam Challis, and, after another glance at Hamilton, devoted his whole attention to the young woman whom he had come to see.

He walked slowly towards the train with her, both speaking in a low voice, and Hamilton said to the brother,

'Who is your sister's friend?'

'Blest if I think he's anybody's friend,' said Sam, in reply, and in his slangy tones of last night; 'he chivied me so much last month that I was obliged to cut and run from him.'

'Chivied you?'

'Something that Aggie said brought him to Liverpool after me,' Sam explained; 'but then Aggie was not wise, and told him too much, or else he read my letter to her, which was like his confounded impudence.'

'He is——'

'A minister.'

'The chaplain of the prison in which your sister has been?' inquired Hamilton.

The youth started.

'Has she told you that?' exclaimed Sam Challis.

'I knew it before,' answered Hamilton; 'but she has made no secret of it.'

'No—she is rather proud of it than otherwise,'

said the brother, scornfully; 'but you knew it, you say?'

'Yes,' was the reply.

'You seem to know everything—do you know why she went to prison?'

'No.'

'Ask that man presently,' said Sam Challis, moodily, 'and ask him if he believes she was in the wrong. I don't like him—but he'll tell you the truth—he'll tell you more than I can. You see, I haven't cared until to-day very much about anything.'

They stopped—Aggie Challis was in a third-class compartment of the Birmingham train now, with the sallow-faced minister standing at the door. There were big tears in her eyes, and Sam Challis muttered,

'That's like him. He has been making her miserable again—he'd make the devil himself miserable,' he added, spitefully, 'if he had the chance.'

'Why is that?'

'He won't let people be—he talks too much.'

As they advanced, Hamilton heard Aggie

Challis say, 'I will not forget,' and the minister stepped back to allow him to speak to her.

'I will say good-bye at once to you, sir,' the girl said, extending her hand to Hamilton, 'and thank you, and God bless you for Sam's sake as well as mine. If he is not too thankful himself just yet, don't mind it—he is very strange in his ways, but he will be none the less grateful in his heart, I'm sure, for the great chance you have offered him. Good-bye, sir. We shall not meet again in life, but I shall not forget all that you have done for us.'

'Good-bye,' said Hamilton, shaking hands with her very heartily, as with an old friend. It was strange the interest he felt in her already—it was stranger that she should say they were never to meet again. She had talked of her brother's paying back the debt only a little while ago, and of finding him, Hamilton Redclove, when it was necessary, and even if it were years hence. He would have been glad to remind her again that it was in his power to help her too, that the chances of a better life were not all for Sam Challis, but he was already

assured that her pride or independence would repel the offer at that moment. He stepped back to the side of the clergyman, who took no notice of him, and who was stolidly surveying the carriage, from the open door of which the handsome girl was talking now very eagerly to her brother.

Hamilton was content to watch the varying play of emotion on that young, fair face—to wonder at it—to be more deeply impressed by the position, than in his every-day life he had been moved yet, for life had been self with him, and self is a disease that eats into a man's heart core.

He affected not to watch them, but he could not keep his dark eyes from wandering in the direction of this strange brother and sister who were taking a painful leave of each other, who might never meet again in this life, and whom he had helped to part by the power of his uncle's money. Surely for good this, whatever might be Uncle Redclove's motives—surely the one fair chance to Samuel Challis this time. The sister spoke very rapidly and with great

excitement; he could see her lips moving quickly, and she was proferring him advice, encouragement, and asking of him a promise in her turn—the old promise perhaps to pay back his debt of obligation some day. The gaunt minister by Hamilton's side watched with him, but with a grave, unmoved face.

Finally there was a burst of tears, two arms were twined hastily round Sam's neck, and withdrawn again, then the brother stepped back, red-eyed, and with a face strangely convulsed, and the guard slammed-to the carriage door and whistled. The engine shrieked in answer, and the train moved on, with Aggie Challis peering forth again, and fighting hard to let her last look be a semblance of a smile at them all.

'Poor girl,' murmured Hamilton, and there were tears in his own eyes for which he could not account.

'Why, poor girl?' said the clergyman.

'She is in trouble. There must be so hard a life before her, I think.'

'Do you pity her?' asked the minister, in his deep, clashing voice.

'Yes,' answered Hamilton, 'with all my heart I do.'

'Surely, she is above it, sir,' said Mr. Fayre, sternly.

'How is that?'

'Pity is for God's unfortunates.'

'And she is not—one—who—?' began Hamilton.

'She is the best woman whom you have ever met in your life—whom you are ever likely to meet,' was the clergyman's solemn reply.

CHAPTER XIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE tall clergyman pronounced his verdict on the character of Aggie Challis without the least excitement or change in the tone of his voice. He was looking after the receding train as he spoke, and he was suddenly surprised and faintly disturbed by Sam clutching his white hand —he wore no gloves—and pumping vigorously at his arm.

'Thank you, governor—thank you, old man!' cried the brother, 'you're not such a hard one as I thought you were, to say that of her. And she deserves it all, too. Every bit of it.'

Mr. Fayre withdrew his hand as soon as he

was able from the spasmodic grasp of young Challis, and said, very calmly,

'We shall never be able to see much good in you, young man, I am afraid.'

'No, that isn't likely,' was the slow reply.

'You are utterly wanting in stability.'

'I have been walking over bog-land till to-day, sir,' was the ready explanation.

'And he never wholly sank through, his sister tells me,' added Hamilton, in Sam's favour.

Mr. Fayre gave a slight grunt, but whether of assent or dissent to Hamilton Redclove's remark did not clearly appear; then he looked down from his superior altitude at the youth who had thanked him for his good opinion of his sister.

'You are going to America, Samuel?' he said.

'Yes, sir.'

'This afternoon?'

'Yes.'

'At what hour?'

'I ought to be on board in an hour and a half —but I haven't paid for my berth yet. Aggie

and I have been making a few inquiries. And there's room for a fellow, they say, when the money's ready.'

'Oh! they are anxious about the money?' asked Hamilton.

'Yes, that's it.'

He spoke reluctantly. There was the same objection to hint at his dependency that there had always been. Hamilton fancied that Sam Challis even blushed.

'In this,' said Hamilton, producing a pocket-book, 'you will find the money which I promised you. Go and secure your berth, Sam, and get what things together that may be necessary. You haven't any time to spare.'

'Thank you,' said Sam, taking the pocket-book somewhat unwillingly from the hands of the donor.

'And now, what ship do you go by, and near what landing-stage?' asked Hamilton.

'The *Star of the West*, opposite the landing-stage 96.'

'I will be there in time,' said Hamilton.

'And I,' added the minister.

'All right; the couple of you, then.'

Samuel Challis moved very slowly away, the pocket-book still in his hands. When he was in Lime Street, he stopped, thought for a moment, and turned back.

'Hadn't you better give me most of this coin when I see you at the river-side again?' he said.

'Why?' was Hamilton's rejoinder.

'I might run away with it,' was Sam's explanation. 'You might think——'

He paused, and Hamilton said,

'I can trust you, Sam, with your own money, surely?'

The lad's face brightened quickly at this assertion of confidence.

'Oh! this is mine now to do what I like with?'

'Yes.'

'Thank you,' he said, and walked briskly away.

Hamilton Redclove and the minister went slowly towards the Mersey-side. They had an hour or so to spare, and Hamilton was curious

to learn the antecedents of Aggie Challis. But the minister was curious, too, and was the first with his questioning.

'What amount of money have you given that lad?' he asked.

'Two hundred pounds.'

Mr. Fayre elevated his eye-brows; it was his turn to be surprised at the liberality of the stranger.

'It is an immense sum of money to bestow on one person, and such a person as he is,' the minister said, in a low voice.

'I have no faith in dribs and drabs of cash doing any good,' said Hamilton.

'I hope, sir, he will prove himself deserving of your liberality.'

'I hope so.'

'And of your confidence in him,' added Mr. Fayre.

'You distrust him?' asked Hamilton.

'Yes,' was the candid answer, 'very much.'

'That do not I,' said Hamilton, stoutly; 'there is something in the young fellow I like.'

'I don't see anything in him myself to like,' replied the minister; 'I have found him always sullen, and obstinate, and deceitful.'

'That is a bad character,' replied Hamilton; 'possibly you were too severe with him.'

Mr. Fayre frowned at the assertion; he was not accustomed to be addressed in this fashion by his juniors.

'I told him the truth, and it was hard for him to bear,' he said, shortly.

'When the truth is told in a hard way, it *will* jar,' said Hamilton, reflectively.

He was thinking of one or two unpleasant truths which his uncle, Lord Redclove, had fired off at him in his day, rather than of Mr. Fayre's style of treatment of Samuel Challis'; but the minister took the observation to himself, as might have been expected.

'There is only one way of telling the truth—simply and fearlessly, sir,' he said, sternly.

'Ah, well,' replied Hamilton, working up again, 'I think there are two ways; but we will not argue the point.'

'There is no necessity.'

'I would be glad, though,' said Hamilton, 'if you would tell me something of the history of that young woman whom we saw into the Birmingham train a little while ago. Should I be trespassing too much on your kindness by asking for a few particulars concerning her?'

'You will find them in the newspapers of two years since,' said Mr. Fayre, curtly.

The minister had not forgiven Hamilton his previous comments on his style of discourse, and Hamilton woke up to the fact that he had been needlessly brusque, and had offended Mr. Fayre. The prison chaplain was tetchy; prison service had hardened him a little, perhaps given him some 'airs and graces' of superiority over the refractory and impenitent, over even the humility and reverence that met him in his dark, objectionable world. Hamilton hastened to make the *amende honorable.*

'Pardon me, sir, but I don't think I shall find that history in the newspapers,' said Hamilton. 'I shall read of an offence against the law, a trial, the verdict of twelve honest, or stupid, men, as the case may be; the unjust sentence of a

judge, perhaps, on one of the best of women.'

Mr. Fayre looked before him intently, without replying to his companion's protest. They walked on in silence for a hundred yards or more, before the clergyman said, without a glance at Hamilton.

'You are very curious concerning Agnes Challis?'

'I am interested in her and her brother.'

'You are sent by Lord Redclove, I suppose,' said Mr. Fayre, curtly; 'all this is Lord Redclove's mission rather than your own?'

Hamilton fairly jumped in his surprise.

'How did you know—who has told you?' asked the young man, in his bewilderment.

'I do not know, and no one has told me,' was the laconic answer.

'But what made you think——'

'Mr Overdown was at the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield's house this week, and saw Mrs. Dangerfield's father. All assistance to the illegitimate children of the late Mr. Dangerfield was refused Mr. Overdown. Had Lord Redclove more merciful thoughts afterwards, and did he

despatch you as an emissary to Liverpool?' asked the minister.

'Well, sir,' answered Hamilton, after a moment's hesitation, 'yes.'

'I thought so.'

'My uncle—for I am Lord Redclove's nephew—was really impressed by Mr. Overdown's story,' said Hamilton, 'and anxious to assist this boy and girl, if it were possible to do so, without any mention of his name. They had no claim upon him; he was even annoyed that Mr. Overdown had called upon his daughter to state the case of these unhappy children; but, out of respect to the last wishes of his son-in-law, he resolved at last on helping them.'

'Hence your appearance here?'

'Yes.'

'You have made a terrible failure of it,' said the prison chaplain, coolly; 'you do not understand human life and character, the poor and criminal classes, and how they are tempted and led away and sink; you are too young and inexperienced for the task Lord Redclove has set you.'

'I don't see how I have failed,' answered Hamilton, reddening at this uncomplimentary estimate of his abilities.

'It is a miserable failure from beginning to end,' said Mr. Fayre.

Hamilton Redclove was never too ready to submit to adverse criticism. He had had a good opinion of himself, until the clergyman had spoken. His idea was that he had shown extraordinary tact in the delicate mission with which he had been entrusted. It was an uncalled-for remark to say that all that he had done for the Challises was a miserable failure; it was an absolute impertinence.

'Doubtless you—a minister of the Gospel—would have managed much better than I,' said Hamilton, satirically; 'but then I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, and was unaware of your great tact.'

'I wrote to Mrs. Dangerfield some months since.'

'It is news to me.'

'And she did not answer my letter.'

'Indeed.'

'I could have certainly managed this matter better than you, and I should have been glad to do so,' said Mr. Fayre. 'I have no patience with anyone coming to Liverpool in hot haste and flinging away large sums of money in a reckless, foolish fashion.'

'I have not been reckless, my dear sir,' said Hamilton, with forced politeness, 'or foolish.'

'You are too confident,' answered the clergyman, 'and so too rash.'

'And you are too distrustful,' said Hamilton, far from politely on this occasion.

Mr. Fayre glowered down at his companion.

'Mine is not a distrustful nature, sir,' he replied, severely, 'but years of sad experience have taught me to understand human nature, its errors and temptations, and to act for it as God and my own heart prompt. I am not often in the wrong.'

This clerical gentleman was over-wise, thought Hamilton, but he would not go out of his way to disturb his equanimity again.

'But I did not distrust Agnes Challis,' continued Mr. Fayre, in self-defence again.

'No—that's true,' said Hamilton; 'but why you did not, puzzles me exceedingly.'

He was ingenious, and saw an opportunity to draw the story from the clergyman after all.

'Why should I have distrusted her?' asked Mr. Fayre, snapping at the bait.

'She was found guilty. There were no proofs of her innocence.'

'She never said she was innocent,' replied the clergyman.

'How, then, have you arrived at so high an estimate of her character?'

'By her manner—her cheerfulness—her faith,' said Mr. Fayre; 'by her history, which I found out for myself, which she did not deny, and which——'

'Yes, yes.'

'And which,' he repeated, 'I am not called upon to relate to you.'

Hamilton was foiled—this tall parson was the most disagreeable and aggravating personage whom he had ever met.

'Sir, I am greatly interested in this young woman—in any way that I can be of service to

her, you may command me,' Hamilton said.

'So that neither your name, nor Lord Redclove's, appears in the matter?'

Hamilton remembered his uncle's instructions, his uncle's fears.

'Yes,' he replied.

'I am not partial to the anonymous,' Mr. Fayre remarked, scornfully, 'and Miss Challis can do without your help from this day.'

'Very well,' said Hamilton, nettled at the reply.

'The result of your benevolence—if it can be called benevolence that brings you here—we shall see in Samuel Challis.'

'Yes, sir, in good time, I hope we shall,' answered Hamilton.

He did not care to keep up the conversation any longer with Mr. Fayre; the clergyman's manner, his tone of superiority and reproof annoyed him excessively, and all the trouble that a lord's nephew had taken to be of service to two unhappy beings, the minister thought but little of. The money that he had given away lavishly, he had been lectured for bestowing; he

had had plenty of hard work, and no thanks, save from the girl who had gone away to Birmingham. Yes, Aggie Challis had not mistrusted him nor misjudged him; she thought that he had acted for the best, and had not misplaced his confidence in her brother; she could understand him better than this stiff-backed parson.

He thought of her all the way to the great landing-stage on the Mersey, and Mr. Fayre stalked on, busy with thoughts of his own. The mystery of Agnes Challis, coupled with Agnes Challis's fair face and frank demeanour, had disturbed Hamilton not a little, thrust him out of his ordinary commonplace, easy-going sphere into the region of romance—a rainbow-tinted world at which he had always scoffed, taking his lesson from an uncle who had gone through life scoffing at everything that was not as clear and practical and unfanciful as Euclid's problems. He would piece out Agnes Challis's story for himself, in due course—if it could interest this hard, unmalleable, angular beast at his side, what a history it might be to him!

He was open to good impressions, and strangely anxious to do good, after the fashion of all high-minded, Christian gentlemen whose souls are above their bank-stock.

The old and the new philanthropist, each full of his own thoughts, contrived to lose each other before reaching that portion of the landing-stage where Sam Challis had arranged to say good-bye to them. Mr. Fayre stopped at a book-stall in his line of route, and Hamilton strolled onwards, forgetful of him altogether, and it was not till the time appointed that they met by the side of the Mersey, along which the wind was swooping with a keener force than ever. It was bitterly cold now, and a shivering crowd of men and women and children had congregated to say farewell to each other, and to see the last of the *Star of the West* ere it steamed down the river to the sea. Crowds of forlorn creatures, forlorn of habit and of heart were passing away in boats to the big ship, but neither from the ship's side, nor amidst the wan faces on the landing-stage, was there to be caught a glimpse of Sam Challis.

CHAPTER XIV.

'NO SAM.'

HAMILTON REDCLOVE did not betray any anxiety; his pride would not allow him to own that he had been deceived, even when the ship was on the point of steaming away to the sea.

'He has been detained—how closely he shaves his time,' said Hamilton, cheerfully; but Mr. Fayre only sternly regarded him, and walked up and down for warmth's sake, with his ungloved hands clasped tightly behind him. The clergyman took no credit to himself for being a truer prophet than the younger man; something in Hamilton's face was expressive of a keen sorrow, rather than of a bitter disappointment, and this rendered him respectful to the one discomfited.

The lord's nephew had acted unwisely, and was suffering for it—he was sorry for him, but the lesson of the evil of indiscriminate charity might not be without its benefit. And yet, he thought, later on, when the ship was moving, and there were cheers from shore to ship, and ship to shore, a deceit such as this, practised upon a young, impressionable man, might turn rash youth into sceptic for ever. Another glance at the darkling countenance, and he went softly to his side.

'You have trusted one who was unworthy of your trust—one who should have been treated in a different fashion,' he added, as Hamilton stamped his foot impatiently upon the floor of the landing-stage: 'but you must not condemn a whole class of unfortunates for the guilty actions of one boy.'

'It was the boy's own money,' said Hamilton, disinclined to give way; 'what is Sam Challis guilty of, after all?'

'Ingratitude,' answered the clergyman.

'Well—perhaps he was not too grateful,' muttered Hamilton.

He did not quit the landing-stage at once; he clung to the hope of Sam's appearing, breathless

and in hot haste, to find that the steamer had sailed without him; but the loungers melted away one by one, the air grew keener with the oncoming twilight, and the ship was long since lost to sight.

He turned away at last, and the clergyman, who had been pacing up and down the pier, turned with him.

'What do you propose doing?' asked Mr. Fayre.

'Going to London by the next train,' said Hamilton, coolly.

'You will not try to find him again?'

'Not I.'

'It is a pity you have had so long and purposeless a journey!' the minister observed.

'Yes, it is a pity.'

'But you might have expected it with Samuel Challis.'

Hamilton nodded, as though he agreed with him; but his face had shadowed a great deal, and his lips were closed tightly.

'Certainly, I might have expected it,' was the final echo back.

They went off the landing-stage together—at the first street away from the river, a shipowner's establishment attracted Hamilton's gaze, with flaring red bills at the doors, announcing the time of departure and the terms for a passage by that fast and favourite steamer, the *Star of the West*. There was a flight of steps, leading to an underground office, with 'For steerage passengers' printed on the side-panels, and Hamilton dived into the depths of the edifice after a moment's hesitation.

'Wait one instant!' he cried.

Mr. Fayre waited for him. When Hamilton reappeared, he answered the minister's inquiring stare at once.

'He called this morning and asked a few questions.'

'Yes—he told us that.'

'And he has not been near the place since,' said Hamilton.

'Just as I thought,' answered Mr. Fayre.

'Well,' said Hamilton, shrugging his shoulders, 'the youth may get on better in England than America; in the New World they can afford to

do without him. Good day, sir. Thank you for the honour of your company.'

He smiled ironically, as he raised his hat to the prison chaplain.

'Good day,' responded Mr. Fayre, raising his hat solemnly also, by way of a return salutation. 'If I can make any inquiries for you concerning this youth, in whom you are interested——'

'I have lost all interest, thank you,' interrupted Hamilton. 'I do not wish to hear of him, or from him, any more. My mission is ended.'

'Ended—completely, do you mean?'

'I do.'

'Very well.'

'And you are right, Mr. Fayre; it is a miserable failure from beginning to end.'

'So far as regards that ungrateful lad; yes, it is,' assented Mr. Fayre.

Hamilton said 'Good-day' again, and hurried from the clergyman. He did not wish to be condoled with, or to be told once again to his face that he had been next door to a fool in his method of flinging away his money. *His* money, not his uncle's;—he would never own to Lord Red-

clove how completely the *gamin* had got the better of the gentleman. He was not overburdened with capital just then, but he would prefer paying the amount to acknowledging the failure. He would tell his uncle that Sam Challis had distrusted him, and had vanished away before reaching ship-board; and his uncle would never suspect him of being so complete an ass as to trust Sam with two hundred pounds before seeing him safe on deck of the outward-bound vessel.

It was a complete failure—as bitter as it was complete.

He had confessed it to the clergyman—he owned it to himself again, as the express train whirled him towards London. He should have known better than to have become the victim of this 'confidence trick,' which Sam Challis had played upon him.

'I have gone out of my way, and out of my sphere, for the first and the last time,' he muttered; 'that dark world lying beyond mine is past all comprehension. I will never try to understand it again.'

He had given up very early in the race, but what was the use of any further effort? He would be always the dupe of these low, cunning natures, never the adviser, helper, guide. The masses, more especially the masses drifting on to moral ruin, were beyond his power to impress, and as far beyond—let him own it now—his inclination to help them as was his comprehension of them. He had accepted his failure, he had confessed to it frankly at last, but his non-success had not done him any good. It had rendered him sceptical even of any good in others. What a lucky thing for him even, he thought now, that he had taken his uncle's advice, as regards the sister. 'Beware of the girl!'—rang in his ears still as he rattled Londonwards. And he had been very careful in that quarter, at least. He had been very much on guard, he thought now; intensely wise, he considered, and not to be deceived by any specious and deceptive manners, by airs of frankness which were incompatible with her position, or by airs of innocence not reconcilable in any way with prison service. He was very glad he had not shown any 'out of the

common' interest in Aggie Challis, for after all she was Sam's brother, one of a family full of mystery, of deception—a family without a right to be in the world.

'Beware of the girl!' The train which rattled him homewards seemed to clatter out the warning in the noise it made, seemed to be singing it to him like one of the mad choruses he had heard the night before at the 'Harp' where the wild Irish had danced. 'Beware of the girl!' Certainly that was the advice of a man of the world, worldly, a man who did not believe in much, and what he did believe in laughed at or satirised, but it was a wise warning. Hamilton believed in it now, as he shook the dust of his forlorn expedition from his feet.

'Beware of the girl!'—and yet there were words of hers which *would* trouble him even then, and which he should remember as long as he bore in mind that expression in her face which was not like the look of a deceitful woman, of one to be on guard, and in triple mail against. Yes, he would be wary of this Agnes Challis, though it was not likely he should ever see

her again—though it was almost impossible.

Here was the end of the play, he considered, with the green curtain down for good, and, so far as he was concerned, all the play-acting—and such play-acting !—at an end for ever.

CHAPTER XV.

CUPPLEDITCH'S.

It would not be quite fair to the character of Sam Challis, to leave our readers in as great a doubt as to the motives of his disappearance, as Hamilton Redclove or Mr. Fayre had been left. There are shadows enough about his life and him, without this extra degree of blackness, which seemed to have arisen from the utter depths of a base ingratitude. Let us see for ourselves why Samuel Challis did not keep his appointment on the Liverpool landing-stage. It will, at least, wash from this social blackamoor a shade or two of sootiness.

When Sam had left those who were anxious about his moral regeneration, he had gone straight home to Cuppleditch's—to the place

which, of late, he had called home, and where a disreputable and dirty old fiddler, with some spasms of humanity under his crust and his rags, had saved Sam from starvation, or the workhouse, or worse. Sam had not been wholly dependent on Mr. Cuppleditch; at times, had even earned money enough to pay that gentleman for a week's board and lodging, and had proved himself at last of inestimable service as a deputy at the 'Harp,' when Cuppleditch was down with fever. And now—Mr. Cuppleditch being very much down indeed, with all the breath of life knocked out of him, and waiting patiently for the workhouse shell and the workhouse hearse to make an end of him—it behoved Sam Challis to take his respectful leave of an old patron, and of Miss Cuppleditch, still in the flesh, and showing a deal of it through rent portions of her wardrobe, and, if not wholly prostrate with grief at the loss of her father, still excited and hysterical with rum which a friendly lodger had brought down to her in a teacup, for comfort's sake, 'and jest a sip or two' to keep her nerves together.

Miss Cuppleditch was a cripple, and grievously afflicted. She had taken her affliction with philosophy, however, and made some capital from it by parading it in the streets, and soliciting alms from those who pitied her, or turned a bit 'qualmish' at the sight of her. She was a distorted being, with her head wrenched round in a half-hanged fashion, and with one shoulder nine inches higher than the other, thus giving her a lean-to and lop-sided appearance, which was rendered less attractive by the right eye being absent, and her tongue lolling unpleasantly from the left side of her mouth. Report said that this crumpled condition of anatomy was attributable to the late Mrs. Cuppleditch, who, in her daughter's early days, and her own irascible moments, was in the habit of throwing the child about the room, or down a flight or two of stairs, or at Cuppleditch's head, but of this no authentic record is in existence; certain it is that this identical Miss Cuppleditch was 'an object,' and yet one which seemed to attract the attention and sympathy of Sam Challis, pressed though he was that day for time. Her greeting was cold and sarcastic, and

calculated to wound the feelings of one extra-sensitive, which Sam was not.

'What do you want back, you ugly imp?' growled forth Miss Cuppleditch—who, it must be confessed, was a most unamiable lady, despite, or rather on account of, her various infirmities. 'What's the good of you a-crawlin' about here agin?'

'I thought I'd come back, just for a minute or two,' Sam explained.

'I don't want yer. You must clear out of this sharp enuf now.'

'When are they coming for him?' asked Sam, with an easy nod towards the still figure in the corner, lying on a heap of shavings, with its face covered with a newspaper.

'I don't know,' was the peevish response; 'they're a devil of a time about it, anyhow, and I want the blessed room straight.'

'Poor old boy,' said Sam, walking to the corner and looking down upon the dead fiddler; 'his were hard lines all through, Nance; right to the very end, and not one of them straight enough to swear by.'

Nance did not reply, and Sam continued, still reflectively,

'I wonder what was the good of it all to him, and why he was ever born at all? Why, if he had only lived a couple more weeks, they should have been jolly weeks for him, I can tell you. Hanged, if they shouldn't!'

'What are yer jawing about?' asked Nance, a little curious, and even suspicious now.

'I'll tell you while I wash, and make myself clean and spry for company,' said Sam, taking off his new pilot-coat and tucking up his shirt-sleeves, 'for I've got good news for you.'

'Oh, have yer?'

'I've come into property.'

'Get along.'

'See how I'm togged out.'

'Yes, yer've *nicked* a coat somewhere, that's for certain.'

'I'm going away.'

'That's a good job,' said Nance.

'Going to America.'

'That's a lie,' she mumbled. 'Who's to——'

'I'm going to begin again, all by myself,

afresh. Do you understand that, girl? and with money to back me, friends to help me. S'elp my God, Nance, it's every bit true,' he cried, with great excitement evident, and with an extempore step or two of a wild jig, cut short summarily by a shooting pain in his side, in both sides, in his chest.

Sam sat down suddenly on the late Mr. Cupplediteh's legs, which, the instant afterwards, he pushed closer to the wall with a reverent, gentle hand.

'Wot's the matter with yer?' asked the woman.

'Feverish—swimmings—spasms,' he explained. 'Get us some water, old girl; will you?'

'Shan't.'

'The jug's empty.'

'Yer ain't a-going to wash here. This is my room, ain't it? And, if the old man was fool enough to keep yer, I ain't. I hates yer. I allers did. I hates everybody.'

Sam passed his hand dreamily over his forehead, and then he laughed loudly.

'You're a-going to fall head and ears in love

with me, Nance,' he exclaimed; 'you're a-going to have me always in your prayers and evening hymns.'

'Well, you *are* precious drunk,' said Miss Cuppleditch, contemptuously; 'of all the ijeots—'

'Look here, Nance,' shouted Sam, 'I won't have any parish shovelling away of the old man. I'm going to give you money enough to bury him decently; I'm going to give you something for a black dress and bonnet; I'm going to show you that I'm not as bad as people think, or as ungrateful a hound as that old Fayre.fancies I am; I'm going to——' there was a long pause, after which he shouted forth, indignantly, 'will you fetch me any water in that jug, or not?'

'Do you expect me to wait on yer?' screamed Nance, 'you mad, silly, drunken young beast, you! What next?'

'All right,' said Sam, with dignity. 'You'll be precious sorry for this, mind you.'

He rose and walked to a broken-lipped jug in the corner, and marched unsteadily out of the room with it. He had not far to go; but, had any one been watching him, it would have been

apparent that he walked with considerable difficulty from the cellar floor up the creaking stairs to the back-yard, that was inconveniently crowded by a big dust-bin and a slimy water-butt. He was a long time filling his jug, which he allowed to run over for a few minutes, and which, when full, seemed unnaturally heavy for him; and, going down stairs again, he found himself face to face with Nancy Cuppleditch, coming up them on her hands and knees at an uncommonly quick rate of progression.

'Hollo, Nance. I might have trodden on you and crushed you like a beetle,' he cried. 'Where are you off to? What's the row?'

'Back in a minute; shan't be long,' she gasped out; 'don't run away afore I come back; I want to get something.'

'To get what?'

'Something for the old man. He's not dead, Sam. *He's waking up!*'

'Alive!' exclaimed Sam, joyfully: 'you don't say so!'

'Yes, alive. Wish I may die too, if he isn't. It's wonderful!'

Sam pitched the jug and water into the yard, sprang over Nance, and dashed back into the cellar and to the heap of shavings, under which, by a stretch of fancy, it might have been imagined that Mr. Cuppleditch, 'up to his larks,' might be now playfully hiding.

'What, old man; not dead, then? Well, I am glad—I——'

Here the lad, kneeling by the side of the shavings and scattering them right and left, and tearing off the newspaper which still covered the features of Mr. Cuppleditch, came to a full stop, and glared down at the white, still face, where no sign of life was flickering, or likely to flicker again till the judgment.

'It's not true,' Sam exclaimed, in little jerks; 'it's a lie of Nance's. HA! I SEE,' he yelled forth, as he caught sight of his jacket lying on the floor, with the pockets turned inside out, and the pocket-book, which Hamilton Redclove had given him, nowhere to be seen.

'*Stop thief!*' he shouted, in his dismay; he plunged upstairs again, and ran into the court, and down the court into the narrow, grimy street

beyond, and then, like a wild thing, along the middle of the muddy road, sending up a cataract of splashes, and screaming like the lunatic he was. But there was no overtaking Nancy Cuppleditch; there was never a sign of her in the dense streets; she had vanished completely away, and her old haunts knew her no more, or hid her in them too closely and securely to be found by Samuel Challis. He darted from one to another, wild and furious and incoherent; he looked in at the 'Harp,' he ran from house to house; from lodging to lodging, of people as bad off as he was, or as heartless and full of evil as was Nancy Cuppleditch; and presently he dropped like a stone in the middle of his own street, and two men, who knew him by sight, carried him back to Cuppleditch's, and bundled him in upon the shavings by the side of his dead friend, and left him to come-to at his leisure. And he came to presently, came back to delirium and the fever which had settled Cuppleditch, to a complete ignorance of passing things, and to frantic accusations of robbery, and wild curses on the robber—came to death's door, which remain-

ed ajar for him for many days, and which all who looked in upon him thought would open wider and wider to admit him, and pass him through after the old fiddler.

But Sam Challis pulled through, and death's door closed slowly, and shut him out of it. Shut him into real life again, with the world, dark and full of evil, spreading out before him like a puzzle map, and finding him just as he had ever been, perhaps worse than he had ever been, more distrustful of those about him, and yet feeling they were the surroundings of his life for ever after this. Life's companions and children of the mist with him, and plodding hopelessly together over moorland and marshland, with no light on their way, only the corpse candles to lure and distract, and with no helping hand to set them on a road which might, by God's help, lead to brighter things.

Was this to be the end of all?—had he had his one chance and lost it, poor Sam, after the fashion of so many waifs and strays, who are as cruelly balked at every turning-point which leads to better days, as was his unlucky self?

BOOK THE THIRD.

THE MISTRESS OF ILVERCOMBE.

CHAPTER I.

COMING BACK TO THE WORLD.

FIVE years after the disappearance of Samuel Challis from respectable society, there came back to the world—from which she had been as securely shut as in a coffin—a certain elderly gentlewoman of whom slight mention has been made in the course of our narrative. No one had wished her back particularly; a few friends who were allied to her by birth had considered her past praying for, and had almost forgotten her existence; only one or two physicians, deeply interested in her strange form of disease, had been energetic in her cause of late days, had written articles about her in medical papers, carefully disguising name and locality, and fin-

ally had pronounced her cured of the malady which had severed her from kith and kin from the day that her son had died in Derbyshire.

Old Mrs. Dangerfield, for years considered incurably mad, had recovered the use of her senses, been congratulated on the acquisition, and been bowed and smiled out of a lunatic asylum, the proprietor of which relinquished with a sigh a very comfortable source of income from that unlucky day when his best patient came back to her wits.

Mrs. Dangerfield senior returned to the world a deeply lined lady of some sixty-seven years of age, a thin-faced, spare old woman with soft white ringlets and sad blue eyes, an unmistakeable lady whom no one could associate with raving madness and padded cells, save the strong-minded young women in brown dresses who had watched her night and day for years, and had had a 'rare time' of it with her till that change came which was better late than never. Better for Mrs. Dangerfield of Warwickshire, assuredly, but not for her relatives who had trusted, and chopped about, and amicably and un-

amicably arranged her estate between them pending her decease, for which everybody was waiting, and which everybody had expected long since. There had been a great deal to re-arrange after Mrs. Dangerfield's unlooked-for return to the outer world, but there had been no opposition to the re-transfer of landed estates, railway shares, India bonds, and three per cent. consols; her relatives were well-to-do without her property, and there was no mistake of identity, or a question as to the brains with which she had come back to society. Mr. Dangerfield's solicitors took her and her rights into their hands, and the lady kept in the background, out of the worry, and shrewdly inquired after everything that she remembered—and she remembered everything, even to an investment of five hundred pounds in a silver mining company that had burst itself to atoms for want of precious metal, and was hopelessly beyond recovery before she had recovered herself.

Yes, it was like coming out of a tomb to this sad-faced lady with the white curls, and the coming out depressed her, rather than raised her

spirits after all. She did not hunt up her relatives, and they did not visit her in any number; her house in Warwickshire was in an out-of-the-way part of the county, and only one or two over-curious cousins looked in to make sure of her, found her hale and shrewd and sensible, and said good-day again. With several of her connections she corresponded—with the widow of her only boy, among the rest, but after a while correspondence ceased, and old Mrs. Dangerfield was left to herself and her old-fashioned mansion, until suddenly and without any warning she turned up in London to call upon those who had not put themselves out of their way to call upon her.

She went direct to her daughter-in-law's establishment—the same house in Regent's Park which one Daniel Overdown had visited five years ago—and was received with as much cordiality as it was in the younger woman's nature to bestow. It was a painful meeting at the outset, bringing back grave reminiscences and terrible antecedents, both women having been very happy, and very proud of Paul Erasmus Wilber-

force Dangerfield when they had seen each other last. They had never been great friends, had not met very frequently, had even 'clashed' at odd meetings unpleasantly, both being proud positive women at that period, and this re-union was, in the beginning, a stiff and angular affair in its odd way. There seemed many topics to evade, and delicate subjects to glide gracefully round. Old Mrs. Dangerfield's solicitors had had to meet young Mrs. Dangerfield's solicitors on business matters very often of late days, for although no legal transfers of property could have been made during the lifetime of the old lady, still Paul Dangerfield had managed entirely his mother's estate before his decease, and the family lawyers had been a trifle lax in details afterwards, not reckoning on present results. Therefore 'business' was tabooed. The mental illness of the old lady was also not a pleasant subject to dwell upon, and the daughter-in-law only expressed a grave kind of satisfaction at seeing a well-known face again, and then hoped that she did not find the house in Warwickshire too dull.

'No, Paul was born there,' answered the mother, with a sigh. 'I have been always attached to the place.'

Here again was a grim silence. The widow never spoke of the dead husband. Grief, pride, or shame seemed to have sealed for ever the lips of the Honourable Frances Dangerfield—the husband was a topic on which no one dare wax eloquent in Regent's Park. Her daughter Estelle never alluded to her father in her mother's company—it is probable that since the visit of Daniel Overdown, when the gunsmith's brusque arguments had distressed the younger Mrs. Dangerfield considerably, silence had for ever reigned in that establishment concerning its missing master.

The tall lady, still a graceful, handsome woman for nine-and-thirty, shivered perceptibly at this sudden introduction of the husband into the discourse, and a new hardness of intonation seemed to accompany her reply.

'It is a dull home for you,' she said, 'you would be more comfortable in town.'

'I may have my town-house presently,' replied

the old lady, as she regarded her daughter-in-law attentively, 'although you may remember that I always disliked London, Frances.'

'Yes, I remember,' replied the widow.

'You wear black still,' added old Mrs. Dangerfield, 'it is for him, I hope?'

'It is that black suits with my thoughts and my taste,' was the evasive reply, 'and that I leave bright colours for the young.'

'Ah! for Estelle. Where is she?'

'You will see her presently. She is riding with her cousin Hamilton.'

'Hamilton Redclove—Lord Redclove's nephew?'

'Yes.'

'They are engaged to each other, perhaps?'

The younger Mrs. Dangerfield's colour heightened for an instant; then she answered quickly, almost sharply—as one sometimes answers a question that is fired off point-blank, and without warning—'Oh no; nothing of the kind. Hamilton does not call upon us very frequently—he travels a great deal—we lose sight of him for months together.'

'Estelle is quite a young woman?' said the elder lady, dreamily.

'Yes—quite.'

'A blessing to her mother as an only daughter should be?'

'I have no complaint to make against Estelle.'

It was a cold answer—it lacked all that warmth and enthusiasm with which a mother speaks of her only girl as a rule. The lady from Warwickshire detected this at once—her soft grey eyes lighted up for an instant with an anxious, inquiring glance, which met with no response from her companion. There was no confidence to be given or received—possibly nothing to conceal under that apathetic demeanour, which years of self-repression, of hard prayer, of asceticism almost, had given to the widow.

The elder lady continued her inquiries—she had evidently come back to the world to ask unpleasant questions.

'Is she like her father?' was the next query.

'I do not think so.'

'I am impatient to see her. I left her a child —somewhat sickly and fretful.'

'Estelle enjoys very good health,' was the calm reply.

The old lady was silent for a while, and the daughter-in-law sat with her hands clasped round a large ivory cross hanging at her breast. Frances Dangerfield started no fresh subject of discourse, made no effort to turn the conversation into a different channel, but sat unmoved beneath the ordeal of an inquiry which she would bear and suffer from *his* mother, as it was her duty to bear. A woman always intensely strong on the matter of duty, she had considered herself from the time that Lord Redclove had delicately hinted that Paul Erasmus Wilberforce Dangerfield was a young man whose attentions he should not be sorry to see encouraged by his stately daughter.

Suddenly, Mrs. Dangerfield, of Warwickshire, broke into inquiry once more. This was a terrible and shrewd old woman whom the keepers had let escape them. She had been severe and proud in her old days, with a big love for her son rendering her womanly and sympathetic in all things affecting his interest, but she had changed

with her malady, or after it. She leaned forward and drew the right hand of her daughter-in-law down from the ivory cross.

'Before anyone comes to interrupt us,' she said, in a quick, eager tone—'those children?'

'What children?' asked Frances Dangerfield. She knew what her companion meant, but she would not willingly affect to comprehend it.

'His children, by that woman,' answered the other, very eagerly; 'they trouble me—there were a boy and a girl—what has become of them?'

'I do not know,' was the impassive reply.

'You have not taken the trouble to inquire, you mean?'

'Why should I?' the widow said, slowly.

The white-haired lady paused at this—well, why should Frances Dangerfield inquire about them?

'I thought you might have heard in some way,' said the elder woman, almost apologetically, 'that they might have been in distress, or in temptation, and have applied even to you for assistance. Heaven knows, my dear Frances,

what one in your position should feel, or ought to feel, under such circumstances; but they are my greatest trouble now—those two!'

The widow was apparently unmoved by the anxiety at the heart of her mother-in-law, and she had never been anxious herself about Samuel or Agnes Challis, who stood a long way back from her self-righteousness or from her interest, atoms of an unknown world beyond her godly sphere.

'I cannot give you any information,' answered Frances, with great calmness of demeanour; 'some years since a working man called with an appeal —almost an insolent one—for assistance, but it was thought advisable to refuse it.'

'*You* thought so?' asked the mother-in-law, curiously.

'I left the decision to Lord Redclove—it was too painful a matter for me to discuss. I was younger then, and less resigned.'

'And Lord Redclove considered it advisable to refuse assistance to those children?'

'Yes.'

'On what plea, Frances?' asked the old

woman, whose insatiable curiosity no reserved demeanour could check.

'I scarcely remember,' was the apathetic answer.

'Establishing a bad precedent?—acknowledging an obligation which might be difficult, at some future time, to disclaim?—bringing round yourself and your father a brood of beggars always clamouring for money?—what was the excuse which Lord Redclove thought himself justified in offering to those who asked for charity? Can't you remember anything about it?' cried the elder Mrs. Dangerfield, with considerable excitement now.

The one appealed to looked from under her long lashes at the speaker—and the thin white hand went slowly upwards to the cross again. Was this mother-in-law really cured of her malady to seek her out in this fashion, and ask these awful questions of her? She was not alarmed, but she was not sorry that the door was opening, and Hamilton Redclove advancing into the room. Here was her excuse—her substitute—at the fitting moment.

'I cannot tell you what my father's reasons were, Mrs. Dangerfield,' said Frances; 'very likely Hamilton can. Hamilton,' to her cousin, 'this is Mrs. Dangerfield, of Warwickshire.'

'Indeed,' said Hamilton, bowing very politely, 'Mrs. Dangerfield scarcely remembers me, I fear.'

'Oh! yes—I remember you very well,' was the quick answer, 'you and your uncle, too. Will you sit down, please—whilst I ask a question which your cousin is reluctant to answer for herself?'

'I am not reluctant—I have no power to answer you,' said her daughter-in-law, rising. 'I will go to Estelle now. When I return with my child, I trust that a subject, which is sorely distressing to me, may be ended for good.'

The old lady watched her out of the room, sighed heavily as the door closed, and then directed her attention to Hamilton.

'What has become of Agnes Challis and her brother, Mr. Redclove?' she repeated, and at once. 'Tell me all you know about them, please. I am an old woman, with their troubles at my heart.'

'Tell you all I know?' repeated Hamilton.

'Yes; you know more than your cousin. You have news for me, and I am waiting very anxiously. Tell me everything, please, and keep back nothing. I want all the truth.'

CHAPTER II.

STILL CURIOUS.

HAMILTON REDCLOVE, faced suddenly by a lady eager for news of those to whom clung more than one ugly reminiscence, was not as ready with his answers as old Mrs. Dangerfield could wish. He had lived down the unpleasant fact of his being swindled out of two hundred pounds, of his being ass enough to part with his money to a young vagabond whom he had discovered down a back-street in Liverpool; but he had not forgotten one item of the facts. He had lost a good deal of faith in human kind since: some people thought that he had grown as sceptical and satirical as his uncle, without the infirmities of gout and advancing years to offer an excuse

for him; but there was no small amount of affectation about his sharp ways and bitter speeches, and, in the society that pleased him, no one could be more agreeable. He was not a bad-tempered young fellow at heart, only one of those eccentric cubs of men who put themselves out of their way to disturb the equanimity of their species. Hard to please certainly, but, when he was pleased, 'such a dear!' the ladies affirmed; and, in ladies' company, Hamilton, a good-looking young fellow of seven-and-twenty now, was always at his best. His own sex he did not like; his uncle's friends he satirised unmercifully; at his uncle's grand dinner-parties, the guests enjoyed the banquet more heartily when he was not invited to scoff at their politics and their sentiments and their grammar, and to interfere with every opinion that clashed with his own.

'They were always a disagreeable lot, these Redcloves,' people said, too; 'but the next lord —the one that is to be when the sour uncle dies —will be the worst of a bad bunch, that's certain.'

It was this young man whom Mrs. Dangerfield charged with questions relative to an objection-

able episode in his life, before he had had time to shake hands with her, and to take a chair at her side. He was startled by the old lady's earnestness; he had not met with any great degree of earnestness of late days in a circle where to grow demonstrative upon any subject was to become vulgar and low, and he took time to consider his reply.

'Tell me all you know about them, please. I am an old woman with their troubles at my heart,' she had exclaimed, in real agony of spirit; but then she had come out of a mad-house, poor old girl, he thought.

'May I ask, Mrs. Dangerfield, who told you that I knew anything of the Challises?' he said at last.

'Your cousin, who has just left us.'

'She could only have guessed that. I have never spoken of them to her—she has never sought to inquire.'

'But you *do* know,' said Mrs. Dangerfield.

'Very little,' he replied.

'And you will tell me?'

'What can I tell you, save that they are better

left to themselves; that they are not what I consider grateful beings.'

'Grateful for what?'

Hamilton did not answer. He thought of his two hundred pounds—that unpleasant fact which he had kept to himself at his own cost.

'What have they to be grateful for?—what interest has ever been shown in them?' said Mrs. Dangerfield, plaintively.

Hamilton shrugged his shoulders, but still maintained silence. Explanation in that direction was impossible.

'It is not that I expect any sympathy from you or from Frances,' continued the old lady. 'You have your own worldly affairs to study, and Frances is aggrieved at the very mention of their names. But *I* am interested in them; I know the story of a past unhappy attachment between my son and the mother of those children whom I cannot bear to think of, battling, perhaps, with privation. I would help them, possibly. If you have any information to offer concerning them, give it to me. I ask it as my right, in the name of my dead son.'

The old lady looked very impressive in her earnestness, as she made this declaration; and Hamilton turned and said,

'It is five years ago since I saw them last, since I went to Liverpool in search of them. The information I received then, Mrs. Dangerfield, I can impart to you, if it be worth anything.'

'You went in search of them?'

'At my uncle's bidding, and unknown to his daughter.'

'I suppose I must thank Lord Redclove,' she murmured. 'Go on.'

'I met both Samuel Challis and his sister. The boy was a vagabond in appearance and at heart; a Bohemian who had run wild, who was untrustworthy and false even to those who might have been of service to him.'

'Well?'

'He was afraid of me, or of my inquiries. After receiving a little assistance from me, he broke his word to meet me again, and disappeared.'

'And the daughter Agnes?'

Hamilton paused again. He had nothing to

say against Agnes Challis; her sweet, pale face had haunted him, a dream and a mystery for a longer period than he cared to own, until the time when his curiosity, or a something higher and better than that, had led him to study her past life, and her past offence against the law, to sift out the whole story, as best he was able, from the pages of a country newspaper. What he thought of Agnes Challis now, he scarcely knew himself. Believing her guilty, could he believe in aught else save in her complicity with her brother's scheme to secure the money from him—in her immense powers of deception, that had even hoodwinked the chaplain of the prison wherein she had been incarcerated? He thought that he believed all this, but he would not tell the old woman what was in his thoughts, or stand in the way of a better life for the girl—he was not quite certain of the mercy, even the justice, of the step. He had been always confused when thinking of Agnes Challis; he was confused again now; his cousin's mother-in-law had brought her unexpectedly into the foreground, and her history he would

leave for more charitable folk than he to relate.

'The daughter Agnes went to Birmingham, to the house of one Daniel Overdown, a gunsmith, resident in Prosser Street,' he replied.

'Is that all you know?'

'That is all.'

'It is very little, and five years are so long,' said Mrs. Dangerfield, with a sigh. 'Was this Daniel Overdown her only friend?'

'There was a clergyman, a Mr. Edwin Fayre, interested in her, and who held a high opinion of her at that time,' said Hamilton. 'You will find his address in the clergy list, I have no doubt.'

'Can he tell me what has become of her, do you think?'

'I think it is very likely.'

'Who is speaking of Edwin Fayre?' said a soft voice at the further end of the room, and Estelle Dangerfield entered from another door, and came towards the speakers, followed by her stately mother.

When Estelle and her grandmamma had embraced, the old lady put two fair, white, wither-

ed hands on the girl's shoulders, and looked long and lovingly at her. Here was one link to the past which she would not willingly snap for all her daughter-in-law's coolness towards her. Here was her son's child to touch a heart that had known much care, and yearned for more affection than it had ever been lucky enough to receive. Estelle was a tall, fair girl, with big grey eyes, and a white, plain face; as tall as Aggie Challis, but not as pretty, Hamilton had often thought. She was a half sad, half weary-looking young woman; and, although there was some of the self-restraint, or aggravating apathy, of the mother about her, she kissed the old lady warmly, and placed her own hands on those of her relative as they rested on her shoulder.

'Do you know anything of Edwin Fayre, then, my dear?' asked the grandmother.

'I finished my education with his daughter Bella eighteen months ago. I left her to the undivided attention of Miss Gilchrist, at Tudor House. I am going to see her in a few weeks, with mamma's permission.'

She turned round and made a formal curtsey to mamma.

'I am not quite certain I can grant the permission,' replied the mother; 'I do not admire the young lady whom you have chosen for a friend. She is too light in her manner.'

'The young lady should be light, Frances,' remarked old Mrs. Dangerfield; 'youth passes away, and care comes quickly to all of us.'

The daughter-in-law still maintained her position. She had been always hard to move, for that matter, despite her apparent gentleness.

'Miss Fayre is a clergyman's daughter, and should be staider of demeanour,' the mother said; 'she has an example to set to others—she has her father's dignity and holy office to respect. I do not admire Miss Fayre in any great degree.'

'Have you ever seen her, mamma?' was the quiet inquiry.

'I estimate her character from the opinion of one of her *dearest* friends.'

There was a little emphasis on the superlative degree—a little sharpness even in the mother's

answer, as if Miss Fayre had come between the mother and daughter, and taken some love to herself, which the mother was jealous of losing. There was only Estelle to love in the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield's neutral-tinted world, and Estelle seemed almost as fond of other folk as of herself. This had been a new trial to bear, we may say at once, for the better understanding of our widow's character.

'Where does Mr. Fayre reside?' asked the old lady.

'In Warwickshire,' replied the granddaughter. 'He is rector of Grayling; you must know him yourself.'

'Grayling is seven miles from my home, and I never go to church.'

'Never attend Divine service!' exclaimed Frances Dangerfield, exhibiting more animation at this extraordinary assertion than she had hitherto displayed.

'Grayling is the nearest church, and I give my horses a rest on Sundays, and let my servants go instead of me. I am not happy in church—not fit for it,' she added, very solemnly.

Mrs. Dangerfield the younger looked up at the ceiling, and silently offered a prayer for her irreverent mother-in-law on the spot. Conversation flagged after this—an effectual damper had been put on it by the last remark—and it was in a very mild and flabby manner that old Mrs. Dangerfield was asked to stay to dinner, an invitation which was promptly declined.

'Thank you, Frances—no,' she said, rising; 'this is a passing call only. I wish to be in Birmingham this evening,' she added, looking at Hamilton—'and in my own Warwickshire home to-morrow morning.'

'Then I shall not press you to stay,' said Frances, calmly.

'But I will press you to come and see me—to bring your daughter with you. I am not anxious to keep my big house to myself. Estelle is my son's child and must not keep away.'

It was a significant hint, and Mrs. Dangerfield, of Warwickshire, was well-to-do in the world, with power to leave her money where she pleased. Estelle's mother knew this, and though she was far from a mercenary woman,

still there was Estelle, and Estelle's chances in life to consider.

'Thank you,' Frances Dangerfield said; 'Estelle will come to Warwickshire and see you. She will be near her friend, too,' she added, in a sadder tone.

'And you?'

'I am not fond of change—but some day, I hope, I——' And then the Honourable Mrs. Dangerfield's voice faded away. Her will was not strong enough to promise anything for herself, and in her mother-in-law's society there was no attraction for her; only awkward and ugly references to a past which had embittered her life.

The old lady did not repeat her invitation. She departed after a few more words, and Hamilton went down with her, opened the door of her carriage, and was the last to shake hands. She retained his hand for a moment or two longer than was necessary, and peered closely into his face.

'When do you see your uncle again?' she inquired.

'I hardly know,' he said, laughingly; 'I am supposed to be his private secretary, but work is not pressing.'

'Tell Lord Redclove, when you see him,' she added, with a set expression on her face, which rendered it hard and sharp as a statue's, 'that I have come out of the mad-house.'

Hamilton was startled, but he was a man who prided himself on disguising his emotion—a sham philosopher.

'His lordship will be charmed to hear that you have recovered from your indisposition thus happily,' Hamilton said, bowing over the hand still in his own.

'Happily!' she echoed; then she passed into the carriage, and looked out of the window at him. 'You may come to Warwickshire when Estelle's there, Mr. Redclove,' she said through the open window. 'I think I should be glad to see you. If I am disappointed, why, it's easy for you to go away again.'

'I shall be delighted!' he muttered.

'And now, please, tell the coachman to drive to the North-Western Railway Station. I am

going to find Daniel Overdown at once.'

Hamilton, thus requested, gave the necessary order, and then old Mrs. Dangerfield was whirled away. He stood looking after her carriage for a moment.

'They have only half-cured that old party,' he soliloquised; 'I shouldn't wonder if she does not give her friends and relations a heap of trouble presently.'

CHAPTER III.

FOLLOWING ON.

PAUL DANGERFIELD'S mother had been a woman of wonderful energy in her youth, or else she had resolved to make up by extra exertion for years of supineness in the asylum from which she had been set free. Somewhat old, somewhat feeble, with a general shakiness of gait, she did not appear to be a woman capable of any great exertion, but, rather, one fast leaving health and strength behind her, and requiring careful nursing for the remainder of her life. Appearances were deceptive, however, and Mrs. Dangerfield showed no diminution of vigour in her expedition. She reached Birmingham in three hours, hired a cab, and drove off imme-

diately to Prosser Street—a dark, narrow, ill-lighted thoroughfare, which even at that early hour of the evening might have daunted a stronger nerve than hers to explore.

The old lady did not think of danger; she had made up her mind to find Mr. Overdown, and she was busy with inquiries of any and every one whom she encountered from the moment that she had told the cabman to wait for her at the corner of the street. After discovering that the object of her search was living at No. 700, she repaired to the house, and knocked for admission. Before the knocker was out of Mrs. Dangerfield's hands, the door was opened by a quick hand from within, and the old lady was half slung into the room—which proved to be immediately behind the street door.

It was Daniel Overdown himself, who apologised for the jerk he had given to his visitor, and backed and made way for her, as she, without any ceremony, went to the side of an empty fire-grate, sat down on a cane-bottomed chair, and looked eagerly round the room, as for some one whom she had expected to discover.

Mr. Overdown closed the street door, followed her across the room, leaned against the mantelpiece, and surveyed his visitor with grave intentness.

Old Mrs. Dangerfield was in no hurry to speak. After a close inspection of the bare boards, the scanty furniture, and the yawning fire-grate, she looked steadily at the gentleman on whose premises she had intruded, undaunted by his half-curious, half-amused look at her, in return. Five years had not altered him much, and Mrs. Dangerfield looked upon a prim, dapper little man, with very black hair and sharp, black eyes, whom we have seen for ourselves in Derbyshire, and later on at Regent's Park.

'You are Daniel Overdown?' she said at last.

'Yes, madam; and to what is he indebted for the honour of this visit?' he inquired in his turn.

'I had expected to find an older man,' she said, thoughtfully.

Daniel laughed.

'Oh! we delegates rise to the surface rapidly, being light and frivolous bodies, with no rever-

ence for the employer's heavy percentages on our labour,' he said; 'but there, if it is anything about the strike, I am sorry to say I would prefer not being converted by a lady.'

'You are on strike?'

'Yes—a long strike this time,' said Daniel, 'but we are likely to win.'

'You seem in distress here?' she remarked, looking round the meagrely-furnished apartment.

'I share privations with my mates,' answered Daniel, 'so that the enemy shall not presently say I lived by their distress. Delegates, you must know, madam—leaders and promoters of strikes—are supposed to wax fat on the troubles of those who put faith in them. It's a lie, as a rule—it's a very big lie in my case,' he added, slapping the mantel-shelf heavily with his hand.

'I have not come to talk about the strike—I know nothing of it.'

'I am glad of that,' he said, drawing another chair towards himself, and sitting down opposite her; 'and now, may I ask what you *do* want? I have to address a meeting in half-an-hour,

and cannot give you a great deal of my company.'

'I want to know where Agnes Challis is?' said the old lady at once.

Daniel Overdown drew his chair some inches closer to her, and said,

'Why?'

'To be of help to her, if she needs help, and to be her friend, if she is an honest young woman,' said the old lady.

'I don't think there is a better young woman in the world,' said Daniel Overdown, reflectively; 'I haven't met with one, if there is.'

'Where is she?'

'In good hands,' he answered.

'This is not a fit place for her—this miserable home is——'

'Spare me—the home was not always like this,' interrupted Daniel. 'I was the first to discover it was not fit for her; and then she went away.'

'Tell me where?' asked Mrs. Dangerfield, eagerly.

'Will you tell me first who you are? I like things square, as a start-off.'

'My name is Dangerfield. I live at Ilvercombe, in this county.'

Daniel Overdown considered this for a few moments, looking attentively at his visitor meanwhile.

'You must be the mother of the man who died at Grey Tor Vale, in Derbyshire?' he said at last.

'I am.'

'But you were——'

'His death turned my brain, for a time—yes,' she said, replying to his unfinished question.

'Then you are all right again?'

'I hope so.'

'You are the very woman I wanted to get hold of years ago,' he cried. 'I wanted help then, and couldn't find it. There were two poor souls drifting away, as it seemed to me, without a Christian to help them—unless a poor clergyman, and a gunmaker out of work, both with their hands tied, were to be taken into account, which they were, after all. At all

events, we saved the girl when she——'

'When she came out of prison. Don't hesitate—I know the whole story.'

'I doubt that,' said Daniel Overdown, confidently. 'I doubt that very much. However, I took care of Aggie—I offered her a home, confidence, and affection, and she found all these till my father died, and my mother followed him.'

'And then?'

'And then—though she did not care to leave me in my trouble—she found another home.'

'Well—what home?' asked Mrs. Dangerfield, impatiently.

'The clergyman's. He had come into property, and a fair living, at last. His wife was dead, and he wanted a companion for his daughter, and,' added Daniel Overdown, with a sudden gulp of something in his throat, 'I persuaded Aggie Challis to go.'

'That clergyman is a Mr. Fayre—vicar of Grayling.'

'Yes, that's right.'

'How long has she been away from you?'

'Five or six months.'

'You were sorry to part with her?'

'Ay, madam,' he said, frankly; 'awfully sorry. But this was not a home for Aggie after the mother was gone—I could see that sooner than she could. She was earning her own living as a daily governess to a family at Edgbaston—for her mother had given her a good education, and she was no expense to me; she had no other friends, she said, but I wrote to Mr. Fayre.'

He beat his hands slowly on his knees, and stared hard at the fireless grate. There was an expression of deep pain, of deep thought on his face, and his forehead had grown strangely furrowed within the last few moments.

'I am glad you did not ask the girl to marry you,' said Mrs. Dangerfield.

He sat back in his chair with a force that nearly split it.

'Who says I thought of such a thing?' he exclaimed.

'It seemed quite possible to me, that's all,' was the quiet answer.

'But not to me,' said Daniel, with considerable excitement; 'she's a lady, in her way—I am only a mechanic. Do you think I would have asked her?—set up my claim to her on the little that I had done to help her—led her to mistake gratitude for love, and talked her into it—robbed her of every chance of bettering herself in this world, as, later on in life, she might have told me I had. Oh, no; that is not Dan Overdown's style—he's a cut above that kind of thing!'

And, after this odd exhibition of conceit, he sprang from his chair, and walked up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets and his dark eyes gleaming.

'She must be three and twenty?' mused Mrs. Dangerfield.

'That is her age, madam. Getting very old, she calls it, with that dear, sad look in her eyes, you know—oh, I forgot, you don't know!'

'I shall be glad to see her,' said Mrs. Dangerfield. 'I am more glad to hear she is a good young woman now.'

'She was always good,' answered Daniel

Overdown, sharply; 'what right have you to doubt her now?'

'She has been in prison.'

'Do you know what for?'

'Felony,' said the old lady, with a shudder.

'You know nothing about it,' cried Dan Overdown, with excitement. 'She's an angel —not a woman. There never was a thought of evil in her—never one scrap of it. Don't go to Aggie Challis with one suspicion of her in your heart,' Daniel Overdown raved on; 'she would rather you kept away from her than that. And, indeed, what is the use of your worrying the girl? She is strong, without you; no one knows her story but Mr. Fayre—it might be as well, old lady, to leave her to herself. Your notice of her only rakes up the ashes.'

'The ashes of a bitter past—yes,' answered Mrs. Dangerfield; 'but then, this girl is my son's daughter, after all, and I could be of service to her.'

'It is too late, thank heaven,' said Daniel Overdown; 'she is able to be of service to herself and others, and I very much doubt if

she is not too proud to accept a charity so long delayed as yours has been.'

'By adversity, not by inclination,' answered her visitor.

'Ah, I beg your pardon; I had forgotten,' said the gunmaker; 'but I was only thinking of her. I hardly know that I think of much else, after all.'

Mrs. Dangerfield rose from her chair and stood by the fireplace, with her curiosity still unsatisfied as regarded this excitable and singular young man.

'I am glad you did not ask the girl to marry you,' she said for the second time; and, to Mr. Overdown's surprise again, 'You were noble and generous and honest towards her in this as in all else. For you are very poor,' she added, looking round the room.

'Had I been a prince, it would have been all the same,' he replied; 'I would have waited till I was sure it was not gratitude, as I wait now.'

'You wait—for her!' exclaimed Mrs. Dangerfield, almost resentfully.

'Ah! that slipped out; think no more of it,'

he cried. 'That's a big folly which I ought to have hidden from you.'

'Does she know it?'

'Oh, no; I have taken care of that.'

'It is wise of you.'

'If I were to meet her a year or two hence—after she has seen the world, as it were—and she was single still, why, poor or rich, madam, I should not scruple to ask her to become my wife. I fancy I should have a right then.'

'She might be moving in a very different sphere from yours.'

'She would always remember what her sphere has been, and be not too proud to look towards it again. That is—of course—that is, if—confound it, don't ask any more questions, please!'

'How much time have you to spare?'

'Five minutes. The procession will be here then.'

'The procession?'

'We march in state through the town—a few thousands all on strike, all unjustly oppressed, all with one gigantic grievance, which we are determined to crush.'

'Is there any assistance I can be to you—in money, I mean?' said the old lady, softly. 'I am a Dangerfield, and you were kind to my dear son.'

'Not any assistance, thank you.'

'You *are* very poor, I am certain.'

'And awfully proud, I am certain, too,' he added, with his easy, natural laugh returning to him. 'I shall be in full work next week.'

'Concerning Samuel Challis—whom I am very anxious to discover also,' said the old lady, 'can you tell me where he is?'

'No,' answered Daniel, moodily.

'Has he not been heard of?'

'No,' replied Overdown; 'I have a hope he is dead. To be living, is to be a shadow of anything that is human, or he would have come to us before. I said a little while ago that Aggie Challis was happy; I should have said as happy as the memory of this bad fellow will allow her to be.'

'It might be possible to trace him; he may be starving,' she said; 'a little help even at this late hour might be of service to him.'

'Don't think of it,' said Daniel Overdown, sternly.

The interview was at an end just in time. Mrs. Dangerfield had exhausted her vocabulary of inquiry at the same moment as a brass band was heard braying down the street, and innumerable voices yelling and whooping in one tremendous chorus. It was a whirlwind of sound filling that hitherto deserted thoroughfare, and the old lady turned pale, and sat down again in her chair.

'Don't be afraid,' said Daniel, 'it's only a few friends who have called to take me for a walk. Rough-handed, honest Birmingham folk, whom I am glad to speak up and out for; a little noisy, perhaps, but then it's our policy to make a noise just now.'

'You seem to like this excitement.'

'Yes, it sharpens up a fellow. It keeps him,' and here a shade passed over his face again, 'from brooding too much over his own stupid sorrows. Good-night,' he added, 'I am going to step into the street, and draw this door after me. When we are all gone, it will be safer

for you to retire; and, please, make sure the door is fastened, for the cats in this street are legion and full of curiosity. Good-night; my love to Aggie. Please tell her I had her note this morning.'

They correspond, then! thought Mrs. Dangerfield, as she returned his good-night, and he passed into the street, where the air rang with acclamations at the sight of him, and all Bedlam for a while seemed loose and roaring its hardest in that muddy thoroughfare without. Five minutes elapsed before the cheering was over, and the motley procession had moved on, with its band clashing and braying in advance, and then Mrs. Dangerfield peered from the door, and made preparations for her own exit.

She had left a ten-pound note on the mantelpiece of the little room; it was in defiance of Daniel Overdown's pride; but she was sure that there was great privation in this home in Prosser Street. She had written in pencil on it, 'For anyone in distress through the strike,' as her excuse—as an excuse that even this eccentric man might accept after she had gone.

She closed the door, and flitted away down the street to her cab. Half-an-hour afterwards, this woman, restless and indefatigable, was travelling by train to Warwick.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EARLY VISIT.

The Reverend Edwin Fayre, vicar of Grayling, in Warwickshire, was fond of gardening in those leisure moments which the duties of his profession allowed. It was his one hobby, which helped possibly to keep him in health, though it had not done anything to the widening of his narrow chest, or to the brightening of a complexion which neither country air nor exercise could change from its invariable aspect of tanned leather. He was a great gardener in his way, and his garden was worth a visit in the summer-time, when it was bright with every flower which love, care, or money could place there. Amateur gardeners who mean business are early-risers, as a rule; and Mr. Fayre was

generally the first of the household astir at the vicarage, setting an example to the gardener himself, who came across the fields to his work, and let himself in by a door in the back wall. The garden was not at its best in that autumn morning following old Mrs. Dangerfield's flying visit to Birmingham; the early morning had been cold, the fancy work of the season was over; the hard work of pruning, slipping, storing, and transplanting had begun; but Mr. Fayre was early at his labours, keeping his servant well up to the mark, and getting his money's worth out of him, like a practical man as he was.

It was striking seven when the vicar was surprised by a carriage and pair stopping at his front gates. The vicarage stood in its own grounds, and the vicar from the distance could see his gates opened by a footman, to allow of the ingress of a thin old lady, who came along the broad path towards the house; and then catching sight of the clergyman, in a very unclerical straw hat, in the distance, she crossed a grass plot, and struck into an-

other path between a high box-edging which led round to the back of the garden, where Mr. Fayre had been at work till distracted by her early call.

He was wanted in a hurry, he was sure; and he turned down the sleeves of his black coat by way of preliminary adjustment to his toilette, and went some steps towards the lady who had come in search of him. When they were face to face, he raised his straw hat and regarded his visitor with a grave and inquiring stare.

'Mr. Fayre, I believe?' said she.

Mr. Fayre bowed. He was a man of few words, out of his pulpit; and, in or out, he had never a great deal of breath to spare.

'My name is Dangerfield, of Ilvercombe Park.'

Mr. Fayre bowed again.

'The name is familiar to you, I think?'

Yes, it was familiar to him. In what way could he be of service to Mrs. Dangerfield?

'Familiar as a neighbour in these latter days, perhaps; but I don't mean that,' she added, her

keen grey eyes watching the effect of her remarks upon her listener.

'I remember the name of Dangerfield very well indeed,' said Mr. Fayre, not disposed to be too explicit at first sight.

'Yes, I have no doubt of it,' remarked the old lady, sadly; then she sat down on a rustic seat that was close at hand, and looked up at his hard features very closely and critically.

'I am tired. I have been travelling a great deal lately,' she said, as if by way of apology. 'I have been anxious to find Miss Challis, who, it appears, is hidden in your house, after all.'

'"Hidden" is not exactly the term,' said Mr. Fayre, drily; 'but Miss Challis certainly honours my small establishment with her presence.'

'In what capacity?' asked Mrs. Dangerfield.

Mr. Fayre seemed disinclined to reply to this question, suddenly and somewhat sharply put—at all events he was some time in answering the inquiry.

'I cannot say we have given it a name,' he said at last.

'Housekeeper?'

'Miss Challis looks after the household, and keeps the keys, but no—she is not the housekeeper,' replied Mr. Fayre.

'Companion to your daughter, perhaps?'

'My daughter is very much attached to her—you may say companion, if you please,' he said.

'You will pardon me, Mr. Fayre,' said the old lady, very haughtily, 'but I came to hear what *you* had to say, not to leap at conclusions for myself.'

Mr. Fayre became rigid after this reproof. His face and figure seemed cut out of wood immediately.

'You will pardon *me*, Mrs. Dangerfield, but I cannot recognise your right to question me at all.'

'Do you know in what position I stand as regards that girl?'

'Neither as a friend nor philanthropist, certainly,' he said.

'How can you tell?'

'The friendship or the philanthropy comes too late to be of service to Miss Challis,' said the vicar, still more coldly; 'years ago it was refused when asked for.'

'Refused by my daughter-in-law.'

'By yourself.'

'Never, sir!' exclaimed the old lady, warmly.

'I wrote to you.'

'I was in a lunatic asylum,' was the cool reply; 'the letter went to the trustees of my estate—not to me.'

'It is of no consequence now,' remarked the vicar; 'still,' after a pause, 'I am glad it was not pride or indifference which kept you silent.'

'You are glad I was out of my mind—thank you,' said Mrs. Dangerfield.

'I did not say that,' replied the minister, formally; 'you misunderstand me very much.'

'No, Mr. Fayre, I make you out pretty well,' she answered, 'and I hope some day we shall be better friends. I think we shall.'

Mr. Fayre did not see it; but, then, he was

looking miles away, over the black feathers in the lady's bonnet.

'And now,' she added, 'I have driven seven miles to see Agnes Challis. Where is she?'

'She is here to answer for herself,' he said, pointing to the open French window of a room on the lower floor where a tall graceful girl was standing, shading her eyes from the sun, and looking in their direction. Another moment and she was coming towards them.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 084219465